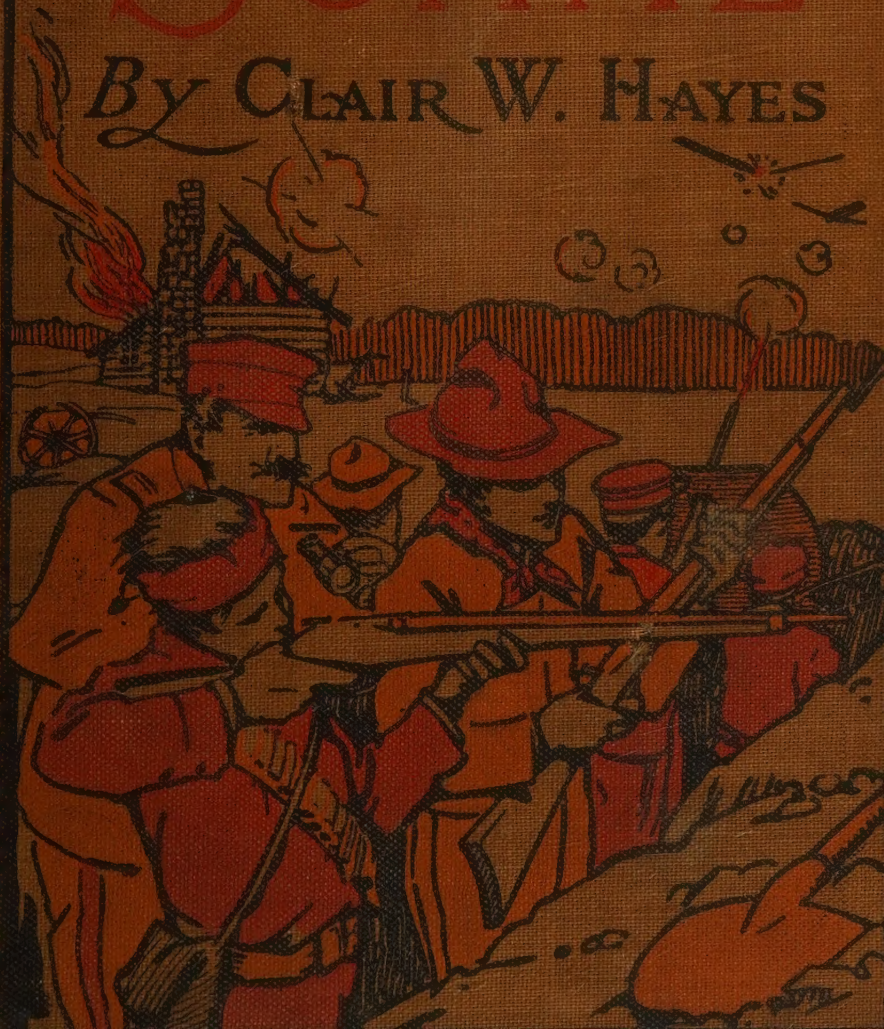


THE BOY ALLIES ON THE SOMME

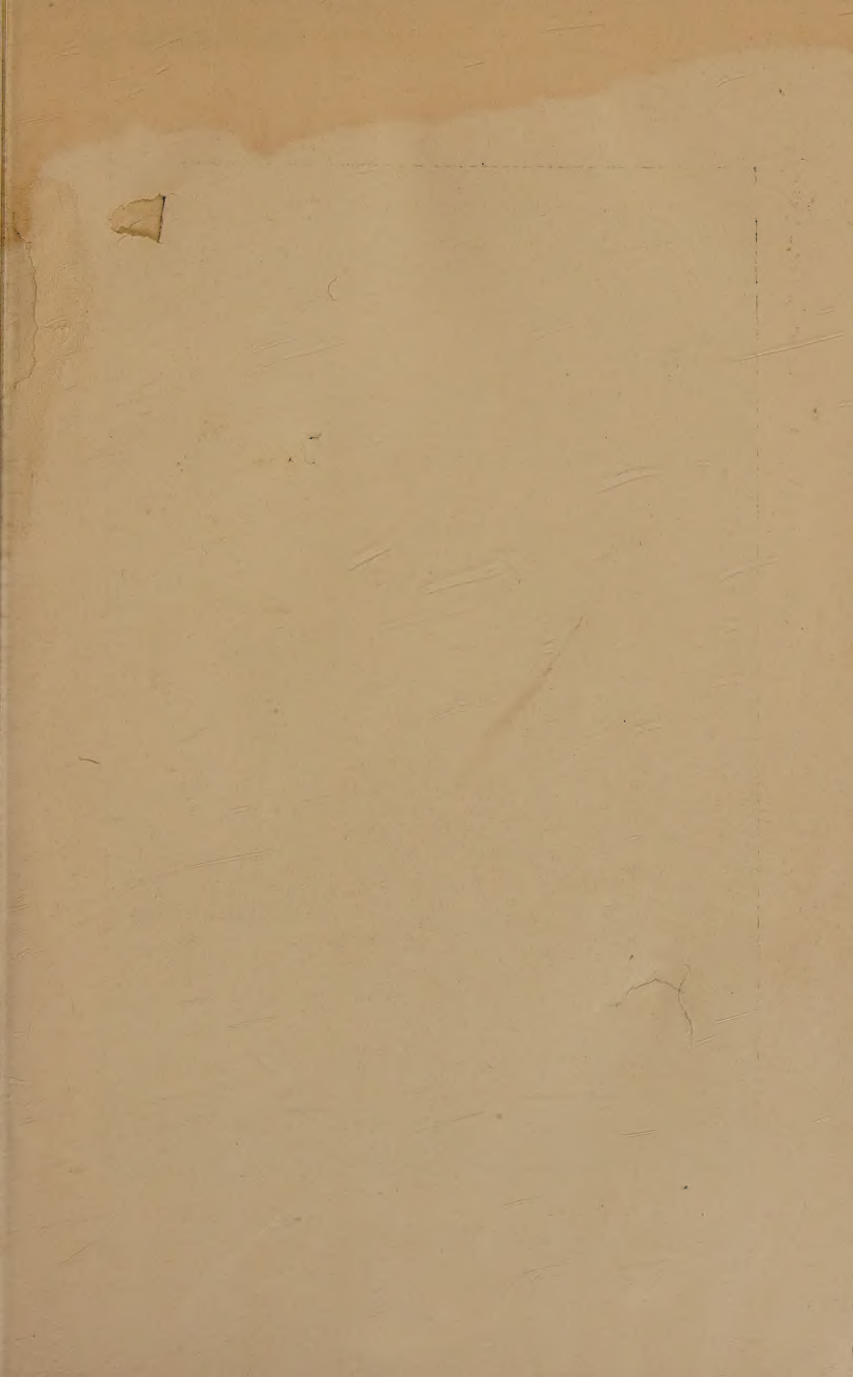
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RIGHT UP TO THE SIDE OF THE CAR THE GERMANS DASHED.
The Boy Allies on the Somme.

The Boy Allies On The Somme

OR

Courage and Bravery Rewarded

By CLAIR W. HAYES

AUTHOR OF

"The Boy Allies At Liege"
"The Boy Allies On the Firing Line"
"The Boy Allies With the Cossacks"
"The Boy Allies In the Trenches"
"The Boy Allies At Verdun"
"The Boy Allies in Great Peril"
"The Boy Allies in the Balkan Campaign"



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THE BOY ALLIES ON THE SOMME

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CHAPTER I

THE GRAND OFFENSIVE

THE gigantic offensive of the Entente Allies along the river Somme in France—the greatest “drive” of the world war since the German attempt to reach Paris in the early days of the conflict—was still in its third month. The enemy was slowly being pushed back across ground hard-won two years before.

On the fifteenth of September, 1916, it was plainly apparent to all—foes as well as friends—that the offensive of the Somme was to be successful; in fact, already had been successful—up to a certain point. And here the heaviest fighting of the great war was still in progress.

The opposing armies that faced each other along what was known as the Somme front, combined, comprised more than a million and a half of veteran

THE BOY ALLIES

fighting men. The battlefront itself, in this region alone, extended, from north to south, approximately fifty miles, and at its northern extremity, bent slightly westward for another ten miles.

In spite of sporadic fighting of a terrific nature in the other war zones of Europe, which, from time to time, became exceptionally severe, the bulk of the fighting at this particular time was being done along the Somme.

Farther south, in the Verdun sector, fighting practically had come to a standstill. Having lost the ground won in the early stages of the battle of Verdun, the Germans had taken a brace, entrenched themselves firmly, and, in spite of heavy attacks by the French, refused to be pushed back farther.

Therefore, the eyes of the world turned to the Somme, where the British drive was steadily bearing fruit.

To the world, this British drive—"The Big Push" it was termed by the British soldiers themselves—was a thing of wonder. Against seemingly impregnable positions they had hurled themselves time after time with impetuous courage and devotion to the cause for which they fought, and time after time their efforts were rewarded with success.

On the first day of July, when the grand offensive was launched, the battleline extended from Albert, on the north, to Chaulnes, on the south. From these points, all along the line, the Germans had been

pushed back—northward, through Ovillers, Poizeres and Martinpuich; eastward, upon the northern end of the line, to within the outskirts of Combles, and, farther south, almost to Peronne. These two towns, Combles and Peronne, were, in reality, the immediate objectives of the British drive.

At the moment when this story opens it appeared that Combles would be the first to fall to the victorious British troops. The capture of this town, it was pointed out, would be of material benefit in an attack upon Peronne, to the south. General Sir Douglas Haig, who had taken command of the British army in France when Field Marshal Sir John French had been recalled to England, had laid his plans carefully, and from the nature of the fighting it appeared that it would be only a question of days until the town of Combles would be in the hands of the British.

Despite the fact that the British had been on the offensive for two months and a half steadily, in which time they had stormed and carried strongly defended trenches and towns, their losses had, it was announced by the British war office, been considerably smaller than the losses of the enemy; still the losses on both sides had been enormous.

The battleline of the Somme now extended from Martinpuich, to the north, to Combles, still defended by the Germans, then south again to Clery, and then southwest to Chaulnes.

If you will take a map and look at it closely, it will be seen that the British had pushed their lines farthest at about the center of the line, and that the line itself on the fifteenth day of September formed something less than half of a half circle. Just south of Combles it projected into the German lines farther than at any other point forming a wedge.

This was the situation, then, when, upon the fifteenth day of September, General Haig issued his orders for the final advance upon the town of Combles—the advance which was to wrest the town from German hands for all time to come.

General Haig was extremely busy upon this morning. Aides scurried hither and thither with orders for division commanders. The field wireless was in constant use, but these instruments were not abundant enough to handle all the business that was going on. The British commander gave his commands quietly, and with no sign of hurry or excitement.

From time to time, as he sat at his desk in his field headquarters, he signalled to one of the group of officers who stood at respectful attention nearby. In each case an officer would approach, salute, receive the general's instructions, and leave the tent hurriedly.

For some moments now the general had been deeply engrossed in a map that lay upon his desk. There was no sound in the tent. The aides and orderlies who stood within were silent. They knew

that when their commander was thus engaged he did not wish to be disturbed ; so no sound broke upon his meditations.

After perhaps five minutes of silence General Haig raised his head. He looked quickly at the group of aides—perhaps a dozen in number now—then signalled one to approach. The young officer—he could not have been more than eighteen years of age, approached and came to attention before his commander.

“Lieutenant Paine,” he said, “my compliments to General Mackenzie. Request him to open on Combles with every available gun at 9 o’clock, promptly, and shell the town for exactly one hour.”

The lieutenant saluted and took his departure. General Haig signalled to a second officer and the latter, apparently about the same age as Lieutenant Paine, stepped forward and saluted.

“Lieutenant Crawford,” said the general, “my compliments to General Brownlow, and request him to order an advance, under cover of General Mackenzie’s guns, at half past nine. At 10 o’clock he will attack in force with infantry and cavalry. Support will be given him when necessary.”

Lieutenant Crawford saluted and left the tent.

While these two boys—for that is all they were, in spite of the fact that we find them so close to General Sir Douglas Haig—are about their respective

tasks, it would be well to introduce them more fully to such readers as have not met them before.

Hal Paine and Chester Crawford, chums and bosom companions, were both American lads. They were about the same age. In Berlin when the European war broke out, they had become separated from Mrs. Paine, and had made their way to Belgium only after arduous experiences. They reached Liege in time to take part in the heroic defense of that city, and it was there that they had won their spurs—and the confidence of such officers with whom they came in contact.

They had seen active service on many battle fronts. They had served with Field Marshall Sir John French before he had been recalled to England; they had fought under the Tricolor at the battle of the Marne, and had won words of praise from General Joffre, the French commander-in-chief; they had fought with the Cossacks in the eastern theater of war, and they had seen hard fighting in the Balkan states and with the Italian armies.

Both lads had shown courage under fire and resourcefulness in tight places. Under previous commanders, it had seemed that the most important pieces of work had been given to them, for their commander had come to realize that if there were hope of success in any mission, Hal and Chester would come as near finding that success as any officers he might select.

So, more than once, they had found themselves at the point of death; but never had they given up hope and always they had come through safely at last. It was true enough that they had not come through scot free, for both had been wounded several times. But immediately they had recovered, they had returned to the firing line.

Until a month before this story opens, the two chums had been with the French army at Verdun, where they were attached to the staff of General Petain. Came a day when the French general had an important document, which he wished delivered to the British commander-in-chief at once. He entrusted the document to the two lads; and then he spoke as follows:

"You boys have rendered me valuable service. But you are Americans, and, therefore, nearer English than French. Also, I know you have served with the British forces. I imagine you would rather be with the British army than with the French. Am I right?"

"Well, sir," replied Hal, "we have been well treated here, and I would ask nothing better than to serve under you. At the same time——"

The lad flushed and became silent. General Petain smiled.

"It is as I thought," he said quietly. "And you, Lieutenant Crawford," he said, turning to Chester, "undoubtedly feel the same way?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well," said General Petain, "I am loath to lose you; but, as you may see, operations here have come to a temporary halt. With General Haig, there is much work you may accomplish. I shall write the general that he may place implicit confidence in your courage and resourcefulness."

"Thank you, sir," replied both lads in a single voice.

And thus it had come about that, a day or so later, Hal and Chester found themselves again with the British army in France.

Both lads had gathered every possible scrap of data concerning the "Big Push" by the British, so when they found themselves attached to General Haig's staff, only as honorary members, of course, they knew pretty well just how the land lay—the situation of the opposing armies, the nature of the ground—and they divined the reason for the final effort to capture Combles—that it would ease the pressure upon the troops farther south in the vicinity of Peronne.

Now, after receiving their instructions from General Haig, they hastened upon their respective duties. And in his heart, each was glad that the battle was soon to be opened with even greater vigor than it had raged for the last few days; and in his heart, each was sure that the fate of Combles was sealed.

Hal whistled joyfully as he made his way toward

that part of the field where General Mackenzie's batteries were stationed.

Chester was equally blithe and gay as he sought out General Brownlow.

Their tasks completed, the two lads returned to the quarters of General Haig. Hal glanced at his watch.

"About three minutes to nine," he said. "Almost time for General Mackenzie to get busy."

They waited quietly, Hal still gazing at his watch.

"Nine——" he began.

But even as he spoke, what he had been waiting for came. General Mackenzie's guns opened upon the enemy with a terrible roar. General Haig sprang to his feet. Every officer in the tent drew himself up and came to attention.

CHAPTER II

INTO COMBLES

As the great British guns continued to hurl their shells upon the foe in Combles, General Brownlow's columns at length began their advance. Among these columns were several of which the men were clad in uniforms of blue. These were French troops, called from farther south to lend a hand to their British allies. All these, under support of General Mackenzie's guns, now advanced steadily in spite of the hail of rifle and shell fire that was hurled upon them by the enemy.

To the north and to the south the British also advanced.

It became plain that it was General Haig's plan to attack the town from three sides at once. Hal, in General Haig's quarters, spoke to Chester.

"It's going to be a great fight," he said quietly.

Chester nodded, but made no reply. Each officer in the tent was awaiting eagerly a word from his commander that would call him into action again. But for a space no orders came.

On other portions of the battleline fighting still

raged; but the fight for Combles was to be the feature of the day. This was perfectly apparent to all.

It was "by the right flank" in the concerted attack on the Somme front that the great battle, which for two months never had ceased, was flaming into a general conflict. General Brownlow's columns, including both British and French, charged the flower of the German army—Prussian guards—four divisions of which were concentrated before them to stay General Brownlow's offensive.

In places the German Emperor's favorite troops were driven back, counter attacked, and again had to yield their crimsoned positions to stubborn English, Scotch and French, most of whom, two years ago, did not know how to "form fours," and who fought all the harder because of the prestige of their foe.

It hardly seemed possible that more artillery could be concentrated against given areas than had been already; but more was concentrated in this attack, both by British and Germans. Never had so many big guns been in action.

The attack was not simultaneous, nor was it along the whole line. Different sections were timed with clock-work regularity, each suiting the purpose of General Haig, while the French and English in General Brownlow's columns acted together as if of the same army.

By the roar of the guns along the whole front in the early hours of the morning no observer could have told where the blows were to fall. Against Combles, however, that redoubtable position which the British had been gradually approaching, it developed that the real effort was to be made.

Now the advancing infantry rushed the old first line of trenches before Combles at certain points, both north and south, of the city itself. The first stage of the infantry action was entirely on the right flank. Nothing more picturesque had happened in the Somme battle than the hardy Australian ranchmen, among the advancing troops, who now moved upon the Prussian guards.

Two weeks before, Combles was the most completely devastated of any on the front, and the British had been pounding it day after day with every calibre of gun. Combles was no longer a village, but an iron and lead mine. Twice already the British had carried their charges into it, only to be forced out. It is estimated that 200,000 shells were fired into it and 3,000,000 of bullets traversed it.

Sapping forward and connecting up shell craters into trenches, the British worked their way, aided by occasional charges, to the village; but the Germans established themselves in a small trench salient southwest of the village, where they were only thirty or forty yards from the advancing columns, and so near that the British guns, farther back, dared not

fire on them for fear of hitting their own men.

Here the Germans had machine guns so placed that they swept the space between the trenches, but the British managed to get across and about midday entered the village, cleaning up nests of machine guns, and across the fields on the other side, establishing themselves in a sunken road. South of Combles, one section of the Prussian guard resisted desperately and here, all the afternoon, bombing and hand-to-hand fighting proceeded.

Here the guard had high ground, which they turned into a fortress, and they evidently were determined to keep faith with their prestige. No sooner had the British taken Combles and swept it than the Germans turned on it a tornado of shell fire from their immense concentration of guns farther east.

The entire movement for the capture of Combles was like that of July 1, when the great allied drive was opened. In the capture of Combles, the French and British in General Brownlow's columns, under the protection of an amazing hurricane of shell fire, co-operated in the brilliant advance. The blue of the French soldiers and the khaki of the British could be seen side by side as they charged; and, as the enemy's positions were taken, the green figures of the Germans filing back to the rear as prisoners, completed the spectacle under an unbroken stream of shells overhead.

The fighting had been furious, but the British had

not shirked their work. They had fought and died with the same characteristic devotion that has always marked the military service of Great Britain.

Neither Hal nor Chester had taken a hand in this fight for Combles, nor had they been close enough to watch the progress of the battle, confined to General Haig's quarters as they had been. However, they had kept posted on the progress of the fighting, for, from time to time, aides returned from the front with reports for General Haig, and once or twice the lads had been called upon to answer the field telephone and receive reports for their commander-in-chief.

But, even now that Combles had been won, the fighting was not over. General Haig was minded to press his advantage while yet it was an advantage. Accordingly, an hour before nightfall, he ordered a second advance.

The general, accompanied by his staff, mounted a horse and rode into the village of Combles. Shells flew overhead from the great German guns in the distance, but to these the general paid not the slightest heed.

Suddenly there was a loud explosion not far from where Hal and Chester rode. This was followed by an exclamation of alarm from several officers.

Turning, the lads saw what had happened. A shell had struck the horse ridden by a member of

the staff, and had blown both horse and rider to pieces.

General Haig spoke softly.

"Poor Bellows," he said. "He's gone."

He rode on slowly, in spite of frantic appeals from members of his staff that he seek a place of safety.

"We must all take our chances," he declared quietly.

Realizing that it was futile to protest, the others became silent. They rode after their commander without a word.

The British were now in full possession of the town. General Haig approached the officer in command, and engaged him in conversation. A moment later he signalled Hal and Chester to approach. The lads did so. General Haig addressed them without preliminaries.

"General Ludlow," he said, indicating the British officer in command at Combles, "tells me that he believes the Germans are about to abandon their present position east of the village. I wish you two lads to ascertain the truth of the rumor that has come to the general's ears. It is dangerous, of course, but General Petain has assured me of your resourcefulness. Will you undertake this piece of work?"

"Yes, sir," replied both lads in a single breath.

"Good. I shall leave the means to you. Report to General Ludlow when you have completed your

task. My only instructions are that you use all haste compatible with safety."

Hal and Chester saluted and returned to their horses.

"Guess we can ride a ways," said Hal.

"Sure. However, we'll have to go beyond our lines, so I would suggest that we get rid of these uniforms."

Hal gazed at his friend and smiled.

"Haven't you had enough?" he asked.

"Enough of what?"

"I mean haven't you taken chances enough. You know that if we should be captured wearing civilian clothing they'd stand us before a firing squad."

"Well, if we don't wear them we won't get very far. They'll shoot us anyhow."

"I guess that's true, too. But where are we going to find a change?"

Chester glanced around. In the very center of the ruined village, a single house still stood, as though by a miracle.

"Perhaps we can round up some clothes there," said Chester, pointing.

They made their way in that direction. As they entered the house it became apparent that the place was deserted.

"We'll have to explore for ourselves," said Hal.

"I was in hopes there would be some one here."

"So was I," Chester agreed, "though I should

have known it was not likely. What's that over there in the corner?"

Hal investigated.

"An old chest," he replied. "May have some clothes in it. I'll see."

He succeeded in opening the chest after some difficulty, and then gave an exclamation of satisfaction.

"We're in luck," he said. "Lots of clothes here."

Quickly the lads strewed the contents of the chest upon the floor.

"Don't know whether they will fit," said Hal, as he selected a coat and a pair of trousers.

"They'll have to fit. That's all there is about that," declared Chester, also selecting some garments.

Rapidly the lads made the change, and stowed their uniforms in the old chest.

"They may be here when we get back," said Chester, "and—they may not."

"Yes, and maybe we won't get back," said Hal.

"Oh, we'll get back all right. How do I look?"

Chester exhibited his new clothes to his friend.

"Well, you don't look very pretty. How about me?"

Hal turned around slowly, and Chester looked him over.

"If you feel like you look," he said with a grin,

"we'd better give up this mission—because you must be terribly sick."

Hal grinned back at him.

"It's the best we can do on short notice," he said.
"They'll have to do."

"Right you are. Let's be moving."

They returned to their horses and mounted. Then they rode slowly toward the east. Hal took a pair of automatics from his pockets and examined them carefully. Chester did likewise.

"All right," said the former briefly.

CHAPTER III

MISFORTUNE

"FIGHTING going on ahead, Hal."

"I hear it," replied Hal briefly. "Guess we had better bear off to the south a bit. We've no business getting mixed up in it. We've other work to do."

Chester nodded his assent, and the two boys wheeled their horses a trifle to the south, enough, they believed, to give the struggling forces ahead a wide berth. They had long since passed the most advanced British lines, and both realized that the sounds of battle that came from the east probably meant that a British reconnoitering party had come in contact with a force of the enemy bent on the same mission.

As they rode forward the sounds of battle gradually became more and more indistinct; then ceased altogether. At intervals there could still be heard the booming of the great guns, British as well as German, and the opposing armies continued to shell the other's lines; but after a time these, too, ceased,

which, in itself, was little short of remarkable. Until now there had not been a cessation of artillery fire for days.

As Hal and Chester continued on their way, darkness suddenly descended over the battlefield.

"That's better," said Chester. "Thank goodness it will be a dark night. We'll be able to get closer than if there were a moon."

"You're right on that point," Hal agreed; "but if we are seen prowling about near the German lines in the darkness, we'll probably draw a bullet or two."

"We'll have to chance that, and trust to luck."

"And still," said Hal, "we'll have to do better than that."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that we won't learn much unless we get inside the German lines."

"We'll go in then," said Chester quietly.

"Sounds easy," was Hal's grim response. "However——"

He broke off, but his silence was as significant as any words he might have uttered.

After half an hour's more riding Hal pulled up his horse.

"We'd better go the rest of the way on foot," he said. "Dressed as we are, it would be a hard-headed German who didn't know we have no business with horses."

Chester recognized the force of this reasoning, and both lads dismounted.

"Don't expect these horses to wait here for us, do you, Hal?" Chester asked.

"Hardly. They won't linger around long. We'll have to find some other means of transportation for our return."

"Our legs probably will furnish the motive power then," said Chester, "and we're liable to have to use them to good purpose."

"Don't cry till you're hurt," Hal enjoined his chum. "Something will turn up."

"Probably a flock of Germans," muttered Chester.

"I mean something to our advantage. It always has."

"I know that," Chester agreed; "but some of these times we are going to be mightily disappointed when we wait for its arrival."

"Keep your pessimistic opinions to yourself," said Hal. "Let's be moving along now."

He led the way toward the German lines.

Half an hour later, Hal, who was slightly ahead of Chester, halted suddenly and pointed in the darkness ahead.

"What do you see?" demanded Chester.

"Breastworks," replied Hal. "The first German trenches are less than a hundred yards ahead of us. If it wasn't for the light of the campfires in the distance we wouldn't be able to see them."

"That means that the Germans can't see us," said Chester.

"Precisely. We're safe enough here unless they happen to turn a searchlight on us. Then it would be good night."

"Well, we don't want to stay here," said Chester. "Let's be moving on."

"They'll spot us when we get within fifty feet of the trenches," said Hal. "However, I guess that can't be helped. We've got to get in there some way."

He moved on.

"Hold on," called Chester. "Just how are you figuring on getting behind the trenches?"

"I'm not figuring," replied Hal. "We'll have to leave something to chance."

"Looks like too much chance to me," said Chester. "You know, Hal, as I grow older, I also grow more cautious."

"No place for caution here," Hal declared. "If we are going to get within, we shall have to take the first means that presents itself; and you know well enough that there is no hope of our gaining the trenches undiscovered."

"I guess you're right, there," Chester agreed. "Then what shall we do?"

"We'll go as close as we can," said Hal. "We'll be hailed before a shot is fired."

"And what then?"

"Why, we'll tell them we want to come in."

"I see," said Chester. "Then, I suppose, they'll throw wide the gate and welcome us with open arms?"

"Well, hardly. But they'll let us in and question us. If we can't find some satisfactory explanation for our presence here we'd better go back to the United States."

"Well, all right," said Chester. "You're better at this explaining business than I am. I'll leave the talking to you."

The lads had been walking slowly forward during their conversation, and they were now close to the mound of earth, which, stretching far to north and south, loomed up in the darkness only a few yards ahead of them.

"Do you suppose they're all asleep back there?" asked Chester finally—they had come so close without being discovered.

"Looks like it," said Hal. "We'll——"

A hail from the German trench cut him short. Half a dozen heads were suddenly raised from the trench and a voice called:

"Halt!"

The lads stopped in their tracks.

"Who are you?" was the query from the trench.

"If you will permit us to advance I'll explain," Hal shouted back.

There was a brief silence, followed a moment later by a German voice.

"Advance," it said.

With their hands above their heads the two lads approached the enemy's trench. Half a dozen rifles covered their advance. But, seeing that there were only two figures approaching, both in civilian clothing, the German rifles were lowered.

"Nothing to fear here, I guess," said a German voice. "Climb in here, you fellows."

Hal and Chester obeyed and a few moments later were surrounded by a group of German soldiers and subordinate officers, who gazed at them curiously.

"Now," said one, younger than the rest, but of gigantic build, "tell me what you are doing here, and tell it quick."

Hal gazed at the German quietly and then said calmly:

"Who are you?"

The German took a quick step forward and thrust his face forward aggressively.

"Who am I?" he repeated. "I'll mighty soon show you who I am if you don't answer my question and answer it at once."

"Well," said Hal, "since you insist, I'll tell you—that it's none of your business!"

The German stepped back in surprise.

"What did you say?" he asked, apparently not believing he had heard aright.

"You heard me," said Hal quietly; "but if your commanding officer is here, I would like to have a few words with him."

"You will have no words with him until you have answered to me for this insult," cried the big German angrily.

"We haven't time to waste with you," said Chester.

The German whirled on him.

"And you, too," he cried. "I shall teach both of you a lesson before the night is an hour older. Seize them, men."

Apparently the German's orders carried some weight; for, before either of the lads could raise a hand to prevent it, had they decided upon such a course, strong hands seized them from behind, and they were held helpless. Hal and Chester both realized the uselessness of resisting and held their peace.

"Well," said Chester, with something like a sneer in his voice, "what do you think you are going to do with us?"

"I'll show you," answered the German angrily. "Hold them, men, till I come back."

He strode rapidly away in the darkness.

"Looks like we were going to have a little fun," said Hal to Chester in a low voice.

"Looks like it," Chester agreed, "but if I get a

chance to take a good healthy lick at that fellow I'm going to do it, just as sure as I'm a foot high."

"Better be careful," Hal warned.

"Well, all right, but if I get a good opening, I'll——"

What Chester might have said was interrupted by the return of the big German, who now approached with an evil smile on his face and a small riding whip in his hand. He held the whip before the eyes of the two boys.

"See this?" he demanded.

Neither boy replied, though the faces of both paled a trifle.

"Well, I'm going to use it on you two young upstarts," said the German. "I'm going to treat you like your mammas would."

"If I were you I wouldn't try it," said Chester quietly.

"What!" exclaimed the German, "you threaten me? Let that fellow go, men."

Chester's arms were immediately released. At the same moment he felt a sharp blow across the forehead. Chester's anger burst forth. With a cry he sprang forward, and before the big German, or any of the others could realize what he was up to, he struck the man a heavy blow squarely between the eyes.

The man dropped to the ground; but was up in a moment, and cried furiously:

"Seize him, men!"

Aid came to the boys from an unexpected source. A man stepped from the darkness and a voice commanded sharply:

"Stop!"

CHAPTER IV

SUCCESS—AND FAILURE

"WHAT'S going on here?" demanded the newcomer gruffly.

He stepped forward into the circle of men and Hal and Chester saw that he was a colonel of infantry. The big German who had applied the whip to Chester drew himself up and saluted respectfully, as did the other men standing near.

"I say, what is going on here?" demanded the newcomer again.

The man who had attacked Chester stepped forward.

"If you please, sir," he answered, "I was teaching these boys a few manners."

"From what I saw," was the officer's response, "it is you who need lessons in manners. You will go to your quarters, sergeant, and consider yourself under arrest. I'll have you attended to in the morning and I shall do all that I can to see that you get the punishment you deserve. Go!"

The German sergeant saluted and slunk off in the darkness. The colonel turned upon the other men.

"I don't want to warn you men again," he said quietly. "This is not the first offense of this nature most of you have been mixed up in. I want it stopped. I hope I make myself perfectly clear."

The men saluted, but said nothing. The German officer then turned to Hal and Chester.

"Come with me," he said. "You will have to give an account of yourselves and your presence here."

He led the way to his quarters, and Hal and Chester followed him.

"Now," said the German officer—his name was Colonel Ludwig—"now, I want you boys to tell me all about yourselves. And be careful that you tell the truth. In times like these, I don't need to warn you that if you are unable to give a satisfactory account of yourselves, and of your actions, it is likely to go hard with you."

"We have nothing to fear, sir," said Hal.

"Good. Now, where did you come from?"

"Combles, sir."

"Combles?" repeated the colonel. "And you have the effrontery to tell me that? Don't you know I can have you shot as spies?"

"So you could, sir," said Hal, "if we were spies. But because we happen to come from Combles is no sign we are spies."

"Explain," said Colonel Ludwig briefly.

"Very well, sir. It is true that we have but recently come from Combles. But we are not British,

sir. Neither are we French nor Belgian. We are German boys, sir. We both live in Berlin. We were too young for service when the war broke out, but we thought we would like to go to war anyhow. We made our way to the front ahead of most of the troops. At Liege we were captured."

"But," expostulated Colonel Ludwig, "how does it happen you were not sent to London or Paris with other prisoners of war?"

"That is very simple, sir. There was a young British officer, Anderson is his name, who spent some time with my father in Berlin before the war. He became fond of me. It chanced that he was among the party who captured us. He interceded for me, and for Fritz here. He said he knew my fondness for fighting, and he would arrange that I stay at the front. He had us assigned to duty in the cook tent; and in such capacity we have served ever since, first here and then there. Our first chance to escape came when the British entered Combles. We took advantage of it, trusting to luck that we could reach the German lines safely."

For some moments after Hal had finished speaking, Colonel Ludwig gazed at the two boys earnestly. Apparently he was undecided whether to believe this strange story or not. Fortunately for Hal and Chester, however, he had been at the front long enough to realize that strange things happen from day to day. At last the colonel spoke.

"It is a strange tale you tell," he said, "but I am loath not to believe it. Your speech convinces me that you are indeed German. Where did you live in Berlin?"

Hal named a street at random. Again Colonel Ludwig pondered. At length he rose to his feet.

"Perhaps I am doing wrong," he said, "but I shall believe your story. I don't suppose there is another man in the army who would, but I am placing faith and confidence in your youthfulness rather than in what you have said. You shall share my quarters tonight, and I shall see that you are sent home in the morning."

"If you please, sir," said Hal. "We don't want to go home. We want to be with the army."

Again Colonel Ludwig gazed at the two boys long and earnestly.

"We shall see," he said at last. "Now, make yourselves at home here. I have important matters to attend to. By the way, do you think you could give the commander-in-chief any information of value concerning the movements of the enemy?"

"Only what we have overheard, sir," said Hal.

"That may be of some benefit," declared the colonel. "We shall talk of it more tomorrow."

He stepped quickly from the tent and disappeared in the darkness without.

When he was safely out of hearing, Hal turned to Chester and grinned.

"Well," he said, "did I tell the esteemed colonel a pretty fair tale, or didn't I?"

"Pretty fair," said Chester, passing a hand across his forehead and wiping away beads of perspiration that had gathered as Hal talked. "Yes, I must admit, it was a pretty fair tale. You are far beyond me in that art, Hal. I'll never need to talk when you're around."

"I flatter myself it wasn't so awfully bad," Hal admitted. "The beauty of the thing is that when I started talking I had no idea what I was going to say."

"That's what I thought, and that's what had me worried. Then, too, I was afraid every minute that you would make a slip. But I feel sorry for Colonel Ludwig. What will he think when he finds we have not told the truth?"

Hal shrugged his shoulders.

"'All's fair in love and war,' " he quoted. "Still, I did hate to fool the colonel, he seemed to be such a nice sort of a fellow."

"Well, it's done now," said Chester. "The next thing is to see what we can find out."

"We'll have to wait until morning for that. We can't afford to go prowling about in the darkness. It might spoil everything. Also, we shall have to be careful how we talk in the future. If some one chanced to overhear our conversation it would spoil everything."

"Right you are, Hal. Mum's the word after this. Now let's turn in. We probably will need all the sleep we are able to get. Tomorrow may be a strenuous day. Here are a couple of pallets in the corner. Guess they will do for us. I'm going to tackle one right this minute."

"Same for me, Chester. Here goes."

Ten minutes later both boys were fast asleep in the tent of Colonel Ludwig, attached to the staff of the Teuton commander-in-chief of the armies opposing the French and British troops along the river Somme.

In spite of the apparent impression the boys had made on Colonel Ludwig the night before, it was with some trepidation that they faced him the following morning. They breakfasted in the colonel's tent, and from time to time, Chester caught the colonel eyeing them both keenly. Just before arising from the table, the colonel said:

"You will accompany me before General Hollweg at 2 o'clock this afternoon. I shall return for you at fifteen minutes before that hour. In the meantime, you may amuse yourselves as you see fit. Only, it would not be wise for you to venture too close to the outposts."

"Very well, sir," said Hal.

A few moments later the colonel took his departure.

"Now," said Hal, after he had been gone for

perhaps half an hour, "it behooves us to get busy. We may not have much time after the colonel returns."

"Good," said Chester. "Let me make a suggestion."

"All right. Make it."

"Well, I believe it would be a waste of time for us to go together. We shall have to be back here by half past one if we expect to stay here another day; and if we wish to make our escape before the colonel returns we shall have to start before noon. It's eight o'clock now. You go one way and I'll go the other. We will meet here at half past eleven."

"All right," said Hal. "Let's be moving. As you say, we haven't much time."

The lads left the tent. Outside, Hal moved toward the south and Chester walked toward the northeast. They had a big job ahead of them, and they knew it.

Chester was the first to return. It then lacked fifteen minutes of the appointed time. Hal returned ten minutes later. The lads gazed at each other closely; then both smiled.

"Any luck?" asked Chester.

"The best," replied Hal. "I found a talkative young officer who volunteered the disposition of all the southern troops and their numbers. He told me the Germans would resume the offensive in three days. How about you?"

"I was pretty lucky myself," said Chester. "What information I was able to gather coincides with yours. An offensive within three or four days I was told." He produced a piece of paper. "On here," he said, "I have the disposition of all the German troops along the Somme, numbers, commanders and all. I took them from a German lieutenant."

"What!" cried Hal. "You'll have them all after us."

"Oh, no, I won't. I tapped this fellow over the head when he wasn't looking. He will never know who hit him. He didn't see me."

"That's different," said Hal. "Now let's get away from here."

"Which way?"

"The same way we came, I guess. We will have to manage to get by undiscovered. Come on."

They left the tent. Straight toward the front they walked slowly and apparently aimlessly. From a point about where they had entered the German trenches they turned and walked south, seeking a means of egress. None presented itself. After walking an hour, they turned and walked north.

Another half hour showed them it would be impossible to leave the German trenches in broad daylight.

"We'll have to wait until dark," said Hal.

Chester agreed.

"Then," he added, "we'll have to get back before Ludwig arrives. Come on."

They made their way back; and they arrived none too soon.

CHAPTER V

AN OLD FRIEND IN A QUEER ROLE

HARDLY had the two boys re-entered Colonel Ludwig's tent than the colonel himself strode in.

"I'm glad to see you are here," he greeted them. "I was afraid perhaps you had gone out and wouldn't get back on time."

"We did take a walk about, sir," said Chester. "But we always try to be on time."

"A good trait, that," said the colonel. "But come, we waste time. I have come to take you before General Hollweg. I have told him you are a couple of German boys who have but recently escaped from the enemy. He desires to question you."

"We shall be glad to answer his questions, sir," said Hal, and added under his breath: "in a way that won't do him much good, I hope."

Colonel Ludwig led the way from the tent without further conversation, and half an hour later the two boys stood before the German commander. The latter was surrounded by a group of other officers, and had Hal and Chester been of a timid nature, they must have been overawed by the sight of so

much gold and lace. But they faced General Hollweg calmly.

After congratulating them upon their escape from the British, General Hollweg began his questioning, which lasted the better part of an hour. Hal and Chester answered all his questions quietly and promptly and the German commander seemed much impressed with them. At last he signified that the interview was over.

Then Colonel Ludwig stepped forward and addressed his commander.

"If you please, sir," he said, "these lads have expressed a desire to join the armed forces of the Fatherland. They want to strike a blow for the emperor. They have no binding ties in Berlin, they tell me. Can you do something for them, sir?"

General Hollweg eyed the lads keenly.

"Hm-m-m," he muttered. "They are of sturdy build. They should be able to give a good account of themselves. I'll see what can be done, Colonel. Come to me at 7 o'clock tonight and bring the boys with you."

Colonel Ludwig saluted and led the way from his commander's tent.

"I believe your wishes will be granted," he said as they walked along. "You seem to have made quite an impression upon the general—the same as you did on me."

After conducting them back to the tent, Colonel

Ludwig left them, after telling them to make themselves at home in his quarters.

"Well," said Chester, when they were alone again, "we seem to have passed muster, all right."

"It does seem so. Now we must be careful not to betray ourselves. I guess that should be easy enough, though. However, I don't believe it will be wise for us to go before General Hollweg again. He might assign us to some duty that would prevent an effort to escape tonight."

"I had thought of that. I believe we had better make our way toward the first trenches along about 6 o'clock. Then we can keep out of sight until dark. After that we'll make a break for the open."

"Your plan is as good as another. In the meantime, we might stroll about a bit. It may be that we can learn something of value."

Chester nodded his agreement to this plan and the boys left the tent. This time they walked east, straight back through the heart of the great German camp. Officers and men were all about, but none interfered with them.

They came suddenly upon a group of officers who were seated upon the ground playing cards. Thinking that perhaps they could overhear a conversation that would mean something to them, the boys approached; and at almost the same moment each started back in surprise.

Among the group of officers, attired like the rest

in full uniform, sat a rotund and familiar figure. In spite of his German garb, Hal and Chester recognized him on the instant. There could be no mistaking that figure. It answered the description of Anthony Stubbs, war correspondent of the *New York Gazette*, companion and friend of Hal and Chester.

In spite of their surprise, however, neither lad manifested it. A show of emotion might have proved fatal to their plans, and the boys realized it. But to the mind of both came the same question:

"What on earth is he doing here and in that uniform?"

Stubbs had not yet noticed their presence and Hal felt a trifle uneasy for fear Stubbs would betray himself when his eyes did fall on them. But he need not have worried.

Glancing up from his cards a few moments later, Stubbs' eyes fell upon the two lads. For several seconds he gazed straight at them, then his eyes returned to his cards. Hal breathed easier. He knew that Stubbs had recognized them. Hal moved around the circle of players until he stood behind Stubbs. Chester followed him.

The game progressed for some moments longer, Hal and Chester still looking on. Suddenly Stubbs, who at that instant had played a good hand badly, whirled on Hal, who was closest to him.

"Don't stand behind me," he cried. "Don't you

know it's bad luck to stand behind a man when he's playing cards. No wonder I can't win."

It came to Hal that Stubbs was trying to embroil him in an argument, though with what purpose in mind Hal had not the slightest idea. But the lad played his hand as well as he could.

"Superstitious, are you?" he said with a grin. "A superstitious man has no business playing cards. He never wins."

Stubbs gazed at him angrily.

"You talk as though you know something about it," he said angrily.

"I guess I could give you a few lessons," said Hal. "I may be young, but I can beat what I have seen you do."

"Same here," said Chester, taking a hand in the conversation.

The other officers laughed.

"They have you there, Koenig," said one with a guffaw.

Stubbs dropped his cards and got to his feet.

"I suppose it will be necessary for me to teach you youngsters a few manners," he said.

"Now, now, Koenig!" exclaimed another of the officers. "The boys meant no harm. Let them alone."

Stubbs turned upon the German officer angrily.

"Who asked you to come to their defense?" he

wanted to know. "I said I would teach them manners, and so I will."

The German shrugged his shoulders, but made no reply. Apparently Stubbs was held in some respect.

"Now," said the war correspondent to Hal and Chester, "if you will follow me, I shall be glad to give you a few lessons. No, I'm not going to hurt you," he added, as the boys shrank back in well simulated fear. "Come with me."

The lads hesitated no longer, and followed Stubbs, as he strode off toward the west. From behind the group of German officers burst into loud laughter, and a voice called:

"Be careful they don't teach you a few things, Koenig."

Several hundred yards west, Stubbs turned south, and after a short walk brought up before a tent.

"My quarters," he said. "Enter."

He stood aside as Hal and Chester entered the tent, and then followed them, closing the flap securely behind him. Then he faced the boys quietly.

"What are you doing here?" he demanded.

"Seeking a little information," replied Hal. "I might ask you the same question, Mr. Stubbs."

"Well, you'll get the same answer," was the little man's reply. "Information is what I am after, though not for the same purpose."

"I see," said Chester. "You want it for the *Gazette*, eh?"

"Exactly; and I've got to get it if I want to hold my job. It seems that somebody told my boss I was having too much fun over here running around with a couple of American upstarts and that I wasn't paying strict attention to business. The upstarts referred to, I take it, are yourselves. My boss wired to me to get him some real news or come home. So I'm after some real news."

"And have you got it, Mr. Stubbs?"

"I have," replied the little man, and tapped his head. "It's all stored up here. The next worry I have is how to get away."

"How did you get here in the first place?" demanded Chester.

"Oh, I manage to get about wherever I want to. I landed in the German lines from an airship."

"An airship?" exclaimed Hal. "Why, Mr. Stubbs, after all your remarks about airships I didn't believe you would venture aloft if you could help it."

"Well, I couldn't help this, could I?" demanded Stubbs. "Don't I have to hold my job? Mrs. Stubbs and the couple of young Stubbs have to eat."

"I see," said Chester. "Proceed, Mr. Stubbs."

"As I said," continued Stubbs, "I landed in an airship—also in a German uniform. Told 'em I'd been serving on the east front and that I'd been cap-

tured and ordered to London. Also I related a story of an escape that was very pretty. They believed it. So I have been hanging around for about a week now, waiting to be returned to my regiment on the western firing line. I was told today that I would be on the way tomorrow."

"Then," said Hal, "the thing you want to do, Mr. Stubbs, is to get away from here."

"Nobody knows it any better than I do," said Stubbs briefly.

"That's what we all want to do," said Chester, "and we are going to have a try at it tonight. Are you with us, Mr. Stubbs?"

"I've been with you fellows before and I'm still here," was Stubbs' reply; "but each time I swear I'll never go with you again. However, I'll take a chance. What time do you start?"

"Early," said Hal. "You meet us well along toward the first line trenches at 6 o'clock tonight."

"They are long trenches," said Stubbs briefly. "Just where, for instance?"

Hal selected a spot.

"I'll be there," said Stubbs. "Good-bye."

He ushered the boys to the door of his tent and they left him without further words.

"We'll get through," said Hal quietly, as they made their way back to General Ludwig's quarters. "We'll get through, because we have got to get through."

"You said it, Hal," Chester agreed quietly.
"We've got to get through. There can be no such
thing as fail."

CHAPTER VI

TRAPPED

THREE figures walked swiftly forward in the darkness that enveloped the great German camp; but while they walked swiftly, they walked carefully and cautiously as well. Around them, on four sides, were thousands upon thousands of men who would have been glad to shoot them down could they have guessed the nature of the work upon which the three were bent.

The three figures were Hal, Chester and Anthony Stubbs. The hour now was after nine. True to his word, Stubbs had met the boys at the appointed spot at 6 o'clock. They had walked slowly toward the first line trenches, apparently having no definite objective. They had not been challenged. With the coming of darkness, they increased their pace and soon had passed the third and second line trenches. Now all that stood in the way of flight across the open country to the safety of the British lines was a single snake-like trench, that stretched, twisted and turned as far as the eye could see from north to south.

Hal called a halt.

"There," he said, pointing, "are the first line trenches. We may all get through, and we all may not. However, I want it understood that whichever of us gets through, providing the others should fail, will first make his report to General Haig."

"Of course," said Chester.

"Is it understood, Mr. Stubbs?" asked Hal. "I know your chief interest lies in the New York *Gazette* and getting your news through promptly. But I think that in a case like this you should think first of the cause. What do you say, Mr. Stubbs?"

"That you are perfectly right, Hal," replied Stubbs. "It shall be as you say."

"All right then. Come, we may as well make the effort now."

He led the way forward, Chester and Stubbs following him closely. Ten minutes later they had entered the trenches.

These great earthworks, with their holes dug in the ground, were manned by men, who, it seemed, never slept. They were as alert at the moment the three friends entered their protection as they were in the day time. To the uninitiated, this would seem strange, but the fact of the matter was that the men who had defended the trenches during the day now slept on their arms all along the line. The night defenders had had their rest during the day.

There were no remarks as the three friends en-

tered the trenches. No surprise was manifested. Nor, Hal and Chester knew, would there be until they should scramble out of the trenches and run for the open country ahead. This would bring a volley from behind, and both boys realized that their only hope of successfully eluding the Germans was by acting when the surprise would be greatest.

It was for such an opportunity that they watched, as they walked slowly along the trenches. Chester glanced at his watch. It was after 10 o'clock; and the distance to be traversed to the British lines was great.

"We'll have to take a chance, Hal," Chester whispered.

Hal nodded, but made no reply. Stubbs had not been taken entirely into their confidence as to the method by which they hoped to escape. There were times, like these, when the little man was not as brave as he was under other circumstances; but the lads knew that, on the spur of the moment, he would follow them without question.

Now the three approached a point where this particular section of the trench projected a trifle from the lines on either side. The projection, as it happened, was defended by no more than half a dozen men. As the three friends entered this place, Hal saw that the rifles of four of the men lay upon the ground. One man was lighting a cigarette and his rifle rested against his leg, stock on the ground.

The sixth man was gazing vacantly into space.

It looked like too good an opportunity to waste. Hal nudged Chester sharply. Chester took Stubbs by the arm. The three approached even closer to the edge of the trench. Then Hal cried sharply:

"Now!"

Hardly had he uttered the exclamation than he was scrambling over the top of the trench. Chester gave Stubbs a sharp jerk, and then, releasing his hold on the little man, sprang after Hal. Stubbs, realizing what was up, sprang after them; a moment and the three sprawled on the ground beyond the trench.

Hal was the first to regain his feet.

"Run, quick!" he cried.

Chester and Stubbs also sprang to their feet and took to their heels, even as the first rifle cracked from behind. Fortunately, the excited German had fired without taking aim and the bullet went wild. But now other shots rang out from the trench and bullets flew nearby.

By the time some semblance of order could be brought out of the chaos that reigned within the trenches, caused by the sudden dash of the fugitives, darkness had hidden Hal, Chester and Stubbs from German eyes behind. Unless Germans came from the trenches and gave chase, and so overcame the fugitives, the odds were now with them. The three ran at top speed.

After five minutes of running Hal brought up sharply. Chester and Stubbs stopped beside him. All three strained their ears as they gained a much needed breath.

"They'll be after us, all right," said Hal. "They'll chase us clear to our own lines."

"Yes," Chester agreed, "and we can't hope to out-distance them. They will come a-horseback and on motorcycles. We can't outrun them."

"Then we'll be taken back and shot," said Stubbs mournfully.

"Don't croak now, Stubbs," said Chester sharply. "We have too much else to do."

"Then what are we standing here for?" Stubbs wanted to know. "Are we going to wait for them to come and get us?"

"We can't run forever, Stubbs," said Hal. "I'm out of breath. I had to rest."

"Well, I'm out of breath, too," said Stubbs, "but I can still run a bit when there is a bullet and a bayonet behind me. You bet; and that's what I am going to do right now—run. Are you with me or not?"

"We'll be far ahead of you, if it comes to that," said Chester. "We have to slow up so that you can keep up with us, you know."

"You do, eh?" said Stubbs. "Then I guess I had better get a good start. But before I go, I want to say that if you pass me you will have to go some."

Stubbs took to his heels.

"Guess we may as well go, too," said Hal.

"Right," said Chester, and the two boys resumed their dash for life.

Even as they broke into a run, sounds of pursuit became audible. The sound of hoofbeats broke upon the stillness of the night.

"They're after us, Hal," cried Chester.

The lads exerted themselves to the utmost. After a minute or two of running they overtook Stubbs; then they slowed down a bit so that he could keep pace with them. The sound of horses grew closer. Hal turned to the left.

"We might lose ourselves in the darkness," he panted, as the three raced along. "It's our only chance. They will expect us to make a straight dash in the darkness. Faster, Stubbs."

"Faster?" panted Stubbs. "Can't anybody run any faster than this," and ten minutes later added: "now there can't anybody run any farther than this."

He stopped and sank to the ground. Hal and Chester also stopped and listened intently. The sounds of hoofbeats were less distinct now. Hal breathed a sigh of relief.

"We're safe for awhile," he said. "We've given them the slip. They have gone around us."

"But they'll be back," said Chester. "We can't stay here long."

"I'm going to stay here," panted Stubbs. "I can't go any place else. My legs won't carry me a step farther."

"If they don't," said Hal, "they probably will be called upon to take you before a firing squad ere the sun is an hour high."

"That's so," said Stubbs, getting to his feet slowly. "In that case, I guess they are good for a considerable distance yet. Let's be moving."

"We'll go more slowly," said Hal. "We'll bear off farther to the south as we go forward. Perhaps we can get away all right."

"We've got to get some place before daylight," said Chester, "or the chances are we'll go back foeward. They are sure to pick us up by daylight."

"If we only had horses," said Stubbs.

"But we haven't," said Hal.

"Why didn't you bring horses?" Stubbs wanted to know.

"We did," said Chester, "but we left them some distance from the trenches."

"Maybe they are still there!" exclaimed Stubbs hopefully.

"Not much," declared Hal decisively. "They are sure to have been picked up some time during the day."

"Well, what are we going to do then?"

"Keep on walking."

And keep on walking they did. Apparently they had eluded their pursuers, for after three hours of marching they heard no further sounds of hoof-beats. There was a possibility that the enemy had given up the search and returned to their own lines, but Hal was not banking on that. The thing that he feared was that the pursuers had gone so far that they would not return before daylight; and, in that event, there was a possibility they would be discovered in the morning before they had reached a place of security.

And what Hal feared came to pass.

Dawn broke suddenly upon the country. The three fugitives gazed north, east, south and west; and there, almost directly ahead, perhaps half a mile distant, came a squadron of German cavalry.

"They got in front of us," said Hal in dismay. "We'll have to get away from here."

Whether they had been discovered the fugitives could not tell. There was a chance, however, and Hal took it. To the right, not a hundred yards away, was a small clump of trees. Hal sprang for them, calling upon the others to follow.

There they were hidden from sight; and Hal felt they would be safe if they had not already been discovered. They became quiet, peering between the trees. The Germans rode on, in a direction that would take them past the trees at perhaps a hundred yards. Hal's hopes rose high. Then, suddenly,

the riders swerved and came directly toward the hiding place of the three fugitives. Hal groaned ; then called softly :

“Up into the trees !”

CHAPTER VII

BETWEEN THE LINES

THE trees had shed their summer green, and the protection afforded the three friends by the leaves was little indeed. However, it was better than none. Then, too, from their lofty perches they could watch the approach of the enemy. Hal and Chester produced a revolver apiece, for they were determined to make a fight if necessary, and then Chester called to Stubbs in a low voice:

"Got a gun, Mr. Stubbs?"

"Yes, I've got one," was Stubbs' reply, "but what good will it do against those fellows?"

"It might do a whole lot, Mr. Stubbs," said Hal. "Get it ready."

Stubbs produced a revolver, and examined it carefully.

"It's all right," said he, "but I don't know much about the things."

"You'll probably have a chance to learn a little something here," said Chester grimly. "It looks like there was going to be a fight. We'll need you. So you stick around with that gun."

"Well, I'll stick," said Stubbs, "but I'll tell you right now, I don't think I am going to do you a whole lot of good."

With this he fell silent, while Hal and Chester turned their attention to the approaching horsemen. The latter had come close now, and the boys could make out the trend of their conversation.

"Not much chance of finding them now," said the first rider."

"I'm afraid not," returned a second. "But if we go back without them we will be due for a severe reprimand; and I'm getting tired of such things."

"So am I," returned the other. "But what are you going to do about it?"

The first speaker shrugged his shoulders.

"Nothing, I guess," was his reply.

They rode on in silence. A minute later the party drew rein at the edge of the fringe of trees.

"They could hardly be in here," said the first rider. "However, we'll push through. We will run on to them if they are here."

The horsemen spread out fanwise and rode in among the trees. Aloft, Hal, Chester and Stubbs maintained the silence of death, for it now appeared that the enemy would pass beneath them without noticing their presence.

And that is what happened. As the last rider disappeared from sight, Chester breathed a sigh of relief.

"We're safe," he whispered.

Hal made no reply for some minutes—until he felt reasonably certain the Germans had passed out of ear shot. Then he said:

"Well, let's get down from here and continue our jaunt."

He slid rapidly to the ground. So did Chester and Stubbs. Hal led the way to the open; and at that moment the thundering of many horses came to their ears. Hal took one look toward the German lines, and then dashed back in among the trees, calling:

"Back in the trees quick."

Although the others had not made out the sight that had presented itself to Hal's eyes, they obeyed his injunction without question. Then, safely aloft once more, Chester demanded:

"What's up now?"

"The Germans are advancing," returned Hal quietly. "When I poked my head out I saw about a million cavalry headed straight for us."

Came a groan from Stubbs.

"We're goners now!" he exclaimed.

"Hold up, Stubbs," said Hal sharply. "You are still alive, aren't you?"

Stubbs refused to be comforted.

"But not for long, I'm afraid," he muttered. "I knew something would happen to me if I came along

with you fellows. You are always where the trouble is thickest."

"Well, you don't have to stay with us, Stubbs," declared Chester. "You can hop down right now and rejoin your friends the Germans. They probably will be glad to see you."

"No; I guess I'll stick a while," returned Stubbs, and became silent.

From their perches now, the three could dimly make out the approaching horsemen, who came forward at a trot in great numbers.

"They are not looking for us, that much is sure," said Chester.

"No," Hal agreed. "They are advancing to the attack. Masses of infantry probably will be along behind the cavalry."

"Also field artillery and rapid firers," supplemented Chester.

"Right," said Hal. "All we can do is wait here."

"And be shot," added Stubbs.

"You'll be shot if you don't keep still," said Chester. "A German could hear your voice a mile. Your voice is not the sweetest in the world, Mr. Stubbs, if you will forgive me for saying so."

"Maybe not," growled Stubbs, greatly offended, "but I can remember it has come to your aid opportunely once or twice."

"That's right, Stubbs," said Chester. "I'm sorry I spoke."

At this juncture Hal demanded silence, for the Germans were so close now that he feared the slightest sound would betray their presence.

For half an hour the three sat in the trees and watched the mass of humanity surge forward below and all around them. Infantry followed cavalry in dense masses, and there was a fair scattering of artillery drawn hurriedly along. But after a time the columns had passed, and the boys debated what would best be done.

"If we stay here they are likely to discover us when they come back," said Hal.

"And if they don't come back," said Chester, "I mean if they should push the British back, other columns will advance and the first thing you know they'll be camped right under us. Then what?"

"Looks like we are in rather a serious predicament no matter what happens," was Hal's rejoinder.

"Hope you're not just finding that out," mumbled Stubbs. "I could have told you that hours ago."

"Well, what we have to decide," said Hal, ignoring Stubbs' remark, "is whether we shall remain in the shelter of these trees, or descend and move forward in the wake of the Germans, trusting to luck that we shall get through."

"We've done pretty well here so far," said Stubbs. "I vote we stay."

"But we must get back with our information," said Chester.

"True," agreed Hal. "Then we have no time to waste here. However, we'll put the matter to vote. How do you say, Chester?"

"That we go at once."

"And you, Stubbs?"

"I've already voted that we stay here."

"Well," said Hal, "as my vote will decide the matter, you might just as well climb down, Stubbs. I vote we move."

"Oh, I expected it," said Stubbs. "If I had voted to go you fellows would have decided to remain in the trees. I never did have any luck."

"If you get out of this, you will be able to tell your children and your grandchildren just how lucky a man you have been, Mr. Stubbs," said Chester.

"If," said Stubbs significantly; "but I don't believe I'll do much talking after today."

"Let's be moving," said Hal briefly.

He slid quickly to the ground and advanced to the edge of the trees, where he waited for Chester and Stubbs to join him. To the east there was not the sign of an enemy, and to the west the advancing Germans could be dimly seen in a cloud of smoke.

"We'll move along after them," said Hal. "If they turn back, we'll have to seek shelter of some kind; but we can go along safely enough as long as they do."

"They won't go so very far," said Chester. "You may be sure of that. Our troops will send them

back quick enough, once they come in contact."

"They haven't always done it," mumbled Stubbs.

"Hello," said Chester, "have you turned German, Mr. Stubbs?"

"Does it look like it?" the little man wanted to know. "I wouldn't be associating with you fellows if I had. No, I haven't turned German; neither have I turned soldier. I'm a war correspondent, and I want to get out of this mess so I can wire my news to my paper."

"We'll do our best to get you out of it, Mr. Stubbs," said Hal. "Put your best foot forward now. We want to cover as much ground as possible."

Stubbs obeyed, but it appeared that his "best foot" was not quite as good as the feet possessed by his two younger companions, for he was hard pressed to keep up with them without breaking into a run.

"Look here," he said at last, slowing down, "you fellows may be walking a race, but I'm not a contestant. I can run, but I can't walk like that. Either you'll have to slow down or I am going to stay behind."

Hal and Chester slowed down to the pace set by Stubbs, and they continued their walk toward the west.

"The thing that looks funny to me," said Chester, "is that the Germans advanced unsupported. What's the idea, do you suppose?"

"I hadn't thought about it," returned Hal, "but it does look queer, now that you mention it. By Jove! I'll tell you what is going to happen. The Germans who just passed will engage our troops, and then fall back slowly. More of the enemy will be rushed forward, and our men will be caught by surprise."

"And we'll be caught in between the Germans," muttered Stubbs.

"Well, that's true enough, too," said Hal, "and I hadn't thought of that, either."

"I had," said Stubbs. "If you'll remember I wanted to stay in the trees."

"We'll have to get away from here while the getting is good," declared Hal quietly. "We haven't much time. We'll move south and we'll move fast. We'll run."

"Maybe——" began Stubbs.

But Hal and Chester had taken to their heels, heading south. Muttering under his breath Stubbs took after them.

And almost as they started, a volley of rifle fire came to their ears from the west. It told them that the Germans and British had come into contact.

"Hurry, Stubbs!" Hal called over his shoulder.

Stubbs hurried.

CHAPTER VIII

A NEW ENGINE OF WARFARE

"THERE come the enemy's supports," said Hal.

It was almost two hours after the boys had left the shelter of the little patch of trees which had stood them in such good stead. They had reached a point which they believed would be well out of the zone of fire, and, from their somewhat distant refuge, they determined to watch the battle, which, they could tell by the sounds of firing, drew closer to them at every moment.

It had been Hal, who, gazing eastward, had first noticed the second body of advancing Germans. These were bearing off a trifle to the north, so that it became evident the spot selected by Hal, Chester and Stubbs, would not be in harm's way, at least for a time.

The first German troops to advance also came into view again now, retreating, firing as they did so. They were retiring orderly and apparently were contesting every inch of ground. It appeared that they were trying to draw the British into a trap.

However, as Hal said, there was nothing the boys

could do to warn the British of their danger if they had not already detected the ruse; so all they could do was wait and watch.

Now the second column of Germans swept forward and mingled with their comrades closer to the approaching British. The firing became heavier, as the Germans ceased retreating and took a firm stand. Then, after a time, the sound of the British fire slackened.

"Great Scott!" said Chester, "are they going to give up already?"

"Looks like it," replied Hal. "Perhaps they have discovered the ruse and are not in sufficient numbers to give battle."

"Perhaps they have discovered we are out here and want the Germans to have a little fun with us," growled Stubbs. "That would be more like it, I should say."

"Stubbs, you are a confirmed pessimist, aren't you?" said Hal, gazing long at the little man.

"When you are as old as I am you'll be one, too," returned Stubbs.

"I hope not," was Hal's comment, and turned his eyes again to the field of battle.

At that moment Germans began to drop suddenly in their tracks. Even from where they stood, Hal and Chester could see the Germans hastily wheeling machine guns into position for play upon some other point than that toward which they had been directed.

"Our men must be advancing again," said Chester hopefully.

Hal nodded.

"Something doing, sure enough," he rejoined.

German officers were rushing wildly in among their men, who began to show signs of confusion. Then the rear lines of the enemy fell to the ground and began rapidly to work with entrenching tools.

"By Jove! Our men must be coming in force," said Hal. "The Germans are going to entrench behind their first line."

This, indeed, proved to be the case. As if by magic a long line of earthworks sprang up before their very eyes, as the Germans dug vigorously. Then a bugle sounded and the men who had been engaged with the British in front fell back to the protection of the hurriedly dug trenches. From there they opened a withering fire. Machine guns were quickly brought into play from new positions, and poured a volley of lead into the distance.

Suddenly a series of strange, startled cries arose from the German trenches. Men scrambled about in the wildest confusion. Some turned and ran toward the rear, only to be driven back by their officers with the flat of the latter's swords.

"Great Scott! What on earth is the matter with them?" exclaimed Hal, to whom this sight was visible. "I never knew the Germans to become panic stricken before."

"Something queer, sure enough," said Chester.

Even Anthony Stubbs showed his interest.

The answer to their bewilderment was to come a moment later. So far not a British soldier had appeared within sight of the three friends, and now, as the first British flag came into view, Hal and Chester gave vent to exclamations of pure astonishment.

For the first flag was mounted in a queer place indeed.

The thing that now advanced toward the German lines, spouting fire and smoke as it advanced slowly, appeared to the boys to have been constructed by no human agency. They stared at it in the greatest wonderment.

"What is it?" asked Hal breathlessly.

"Looks like an ichthyosaurus," said Stubbs.

"A what?" demanded Chester.

"An ichthyosaurus," repeated the little war correspondent, and explained. "the greatest of all prehistoric monsters."

"Maybe it is," said Chester. "It looks like it might be all of that."

"Rats," said Hal. "It's no animal, that's sure. It's a motor apparatus of some kind, armored, and manned with rapid-fire guns. You can see the havoc it is creating in the enemy's lines, back of their trenches. Can't see why the Germans don't blow it up, though."

"They are trying hard enough," said Chester, "but their efforts seem to have no effect. It can't be because they are not hitting it, for they shoot straight enough, as a rule."

"I'll tell you!" cried Hal. "The bullets are glancing off the armored sides."

"Well, it can't go much farther," said Chester. "It's almost up against the trench now. It'll have to stop there."

But the "monster" didn't stop.

Right up against the trench it pushed its head slowly; then, as the Germans fled in the wildest disorder, with cries and screams of terror, this new engine of warfare pushed its nose right into the strong earthworks and plowed through.

"Bad judgment," said Hal. "Now it will tumble over in the ditch."

But the monster didn't tumble over. It moved right across the trench, apparently supporting its weight on nothing more than air, and again opened fire upon the Germans.

"Well, Great Scott!" exclaimed Hal. "What do you think of that?"

Chester shook his head.

"It's too deep for me," he said slowly. "It's a great thing, this ichthyosaurus, as Stubbs called it. But—hurrah! Here come our troops."

It was true. Following in the wake of the monster that had scattered the German troops, came a

force of British infantry. The men staggered along in such a peculiar manner that Hal gave an exclamation of alarm.

"What on earth is the matter with them?" he asked.

"By Jove!" said Chester. "They look like they had inhaled some gas from the deadly German bombs."

"You're wrong," said Stubbs quietly.

"I suppose you know what is the matter, Mr. Stubbs," said Chester sarcastically.

"Certainly I know," returned the little war correspondent.

"Well, let's hear it," demanded Hal.

"Why," said Stubbs quietly, "they are laughing."

"Laughing?" echoed Hal and Chester.

"Exactly. They have been so amused by the antics of the monster that cleared the path for them they are almost hilarious. That's all that's the matter with them."

"Come, now, Mr. Stubbs," said Chester. "I hope you don't expect us to believe a thing like that."

"I don't care whether you believe it or not," answered Stubbs, with ruffled dignity; "go and see for yourselves."

"By Jove! We'll do that," said Hal. "Come, Chester."

They moved away. After going a few yards, Hal stopped and looked for Stubbs. The little man was

standing where they had left him, deep in thought.

"I say, Mr. Stubbs," Hal hailed him. "Aren't you coming with us?"

Stubbs made no reply. He did not even look at the lad.

"We've offended him, Hal," said Chester. "He's in a huff now and won't have anything to do with us until the spell wears off."

"Well, we can't leave him here," said Hal; "he's likely to get hurt, in that German uniform."

"That's so," agreed Chester. "We'll have to take him with us."

They retraced their steps, and directly stood beside Stubbs again.

"We didn't mean to offend you, Mr. Stubbs," said Chester.

Stubbs looked at the lad in surprise.

"Offend me?" he exclaimed. "I'm not offended."

"Then what are you standing here for?" Hal wanted to know. "Why don't you come with us?"

"I was thinking," said Stubbs.

"Then you'd better find a safer place to think. Come on, now."

Hal laid a hand on Stubbs' arm.

"Now, don't get in a rush," said Stubbs. "I don't know whether I want to go with you or not."

"We told you we didn't mean to offend you, Mr. Stubbs," said Chester.

"Oh, you didn't offend me," said Stubbs again.

"Then what on earth is the matter, Mr. Stubbs?"

"Why," said Stubbs, "I was just debating what to do. You see that ichthyosaurus disappearing in the distance, on the trail of the Germans?"

The lads nodded.

"Well," said Stubbs, "the Germans are shooting all around it and it's dangerous there; but I have got to have a look at that thing. What's worrying me is whether, if I go after it, I will come back to tell the *Gazette* what I learned."

"You'd better wait, Stubbs," said Hal. "You might get shot."

"I guess you're right, Hal," said Stubbs, "still——"

He took a decision suddenly.

"No, I've got to have a look at it," he cried. "Here goes!"

Before either Hal or Chester could raise a hand to stay him, the little man had taken to his heels and was speeding across the ground at top speed in the wake of the queer shape that had caused such consternation in the ranks of the Germans.

"Well, he's gone," said Hal. "Funny how brave he gets when it comes to a question of gathering information."

"One thing, though," said Chester, "you can bet that when he comes back he'll know all about that thing. It may be an ichthyosaurus or it may not be; but when Stubbs comes back he'll tell us what

keeps it alive—or what makes the wheels go round.
But come, we must report to General Haig.”

The boys made their way westward, and soon
were among the British troops.

CHAPTER IX

STUBBS EXPLAINS

"WELL, Mr. Stubbs," said Hal, "perhaps, after your examination of the ichthyosaurus, you will be able to give us a few pointers about the monster."

"Yes," said Chester, "I suppose you found out all about it."

Stubbs grinned.

"I found out a few things," he replied, "but I didn't find out as much as I would like. They wouldn't let me peep inside. Seems they don't want information to get noised abroad. What I learned was from the soldiers who have seen the things in action."

"Tell us about them, Mr. Stubbs," said Chester.

It was the afternoon of the day upon which the boys had returned to the British lines, and they were now in their own quarters, which they were to share with Stubbs as long as the little man cared to remain. Hal and Chester had been relieved of duty for the day. Their interest in the new engine of warfare, which they had so recently seen in action, was keen.

"Well," began Stubbs, "they seem to have all kind of names for these new contraptions. 'Tank cars,' 'Land battleships,' 'Devil cars,' and a few others."

"Then they are not ichthyosauruses?" asked Chester.

"Not much," returned Stubbs, "though they seem to answer the same purpose. No, they are simply heavily armored tractors, the same as are in use, minus their armor, in agricultural districts in the United States. You probably have seen many of them. By the way, I found out one thing about them that I wasn't supposed to find out. The one I looked at was made in Peoria, Ill."

"You don't say so!" exclaimed Hal.

"Well, I do say so," said Stubbs. "I saw the manufacturer's name on the side of it. They are armed and armored, of course, after they have reached London. As I said, I can't tell you much about their make than what you already know, having seen some of our own tractors. However, I can tell you that the troops think they are the real thing. They tell of many strange feats the monsters have accomplished."

"Well, let's hear a few," demanded Chester.

"I'm talking as fast as I can," said Stubbs. "Of course we have heard reports of these cars before. 'Heavily armored motor machine guns of a new style,' is the way they have been referred to in the

official reports. But this picture is dimmed into insignificance by that drawn by the soldiers, who have seen the machines in actual operation.

"Said a soldier to me this morning: 'They knock down trees like match sticks; they go clean through a wood. They cut up houses and put the refuse under their stomachs and walk right over 'em. They take ditches like kangaroos; they simply love shell craters—laugh at 'em.

"'They are proof against rifle bullets, bombs and shell splinters; they just shrug their shoulders and pass on. Nothing but a direct hit from a big shell can hurt them.'"

"Sounds pretty good to me," said Hal.

"Rather," agreed Chester. "If the British had about a million of them looks to me like this war had ought to be over pretty soon."

"Well, it won't be," said Stubbs decisively; "you can gamble on that. Now, about these tank cars again. After I had looked at this machine as much as they would let me, I sat down on the ground and laughed; and after their ability had been explained in glowing terms, I rather insulted one of my informants when I said: 'There ain't no such animal.' But seeing is believing after all, and, as you know, I had seen one in action. Here's a story I learned of one:

"When the British soldiers first saw these strange creatures galloping along the roads and over

the old battlefields, taking trenches on the way, they shouted and cheered wildly, and laughed for a day afterwards. The troops got out of their trenches, laughing, shouting, cheering, because the tanks had gone on ahead and were scattering the Germans dreadfully, while they moved over their trenches and poured out fire on the German side. These motor monsters had strange adventures and did very good work, justifying their amazing existence.

"Over the British trenches in the twilight of dawn one of these monsters lurched up and came crawling forward to the rescue of hard-pressed troops, who called out words of encouragement to it and laughed so much that some of the men were laughing even when bullets caught them in their throats. It waddled forward right over the old German trenches, went forward very steadily. There was silence from the Germans, then suddenly their machine-gun fire burst out in nervous spasms, but the tank did not mind. The bullets fell from its side harmlessly.

"It advanced against a broken wall, leaned up against it heavily until it fell with a crash of bricks, and then rose on to the bricks and passed over them and walked straight into the midst of a factory ruins. From its side came flashes of fire and a hail of bullets; and then it trampled over the machine-gun emplacement, 'having a grand time,' as one of the men said with enthusiasm.

"It crushed the machine guns under its heavy ribs and killed the machine-gun crews with its deadly fire. The infantry followed in and took the place after this good help and then advanced again around the flanks of the monster.

"Then they went on to the village. It was like all these villages in German hands, tunneled with a nest of dugouts and strongholds hard to take. The British troops entered it from the eastern side, fought yard by yard, stubbornly resolved to have it. Along came the tank, plowing about, searching for German machine guns, thrusting over bits of wall, nosing here and there and sitting on heaps of ruins while it fired down the streets. That evening the British took the village."

"Fine!" exclaimed Chester, who had been greatly interested in Stubbs' account of the activities of the tank cars. "I'd like to be assigned to duty on one of those things."

"I wouldn't mind it either," declared Hal. "Perhaps some day we may have our chance."

"Well, you can pine for all the danger you wish," said Stubbs, "but not for me. I can see that duty on one of those things, as Chester calls them, would be attended with even greater danger than just plain fighting. No, thanks."

"But didn't you learn anything more about them, Mr. Stubbs?" asked Hal. "How they are constructed?"

"I told you they are nothing more or less than farming tractors. They are designed to traverse the most difficult and chaotic country and to sweep away all obstacles in their path. They are of a large size, with caterpillar wheels constructed to cover the widest trench or shell crater and to enable the vehicle to tackle almost any depth of mire. They lay their own track across a trench and pick it up after them.

"The crew is protected by various numbers of armored plates, any one of which is impervious to machine-gun fire, as well as rifle fire and shrapnel bullets. While from a defensive point of view, they are almost perfect, at the same time their offensive qualities are even superior. To my mind they look like armadillos. That's all I can tell you about them."

"And I think that is enough, Mr. Stubbs," declared Chester. "You learned a whole lot in one trip, if you ask me."

"Well, that's my business," replied Stubbs, greatly flattered, for the little man was very susceptible to praise. "I tell you the readers of the *New York Gazette* will be surprised when they learn what has just come to my attention."

"Then you don't think the people of America have learned of these monsters?" asked Hal.

"Not yet, or I should have heard from my boss before now. I hope to be the first to tell the peo-

ple of the United States of the existence of an American product on the firing line in France."

"It is something to be proud of," declared Hal.

"Rather," agreed Chester. "And I guess we can turn the machines out faster in the United States than any other country can produce them. They'll come in handy in case of a little war of our own."

"Well," said Hal, "I can't help thinking that I would like to take a little jaunt in one of these tank cars. Think I'll speak to the general about it. I can run one, all right, with a little practice. We might take Stubbs with us. He could then gather a little information at first hand."

"Now listen here!" exclaimed Stubbs. "Don't you go suggesting anything like that. The first thing you know you will inveigle me into one of those contraptions, and then it will be goodnight for Anthony Stubbs."

"Stubbs," said Chester severely, "you always let out a yelp before you're hurt."

"That's simply because I know what is coming," declared the little man. "You may have noticed that after each yelp you speak of, something always has happened."

"There is some truth in that, too," Hal admitted. "However, I don't anticipate that we shall have occasion to use one of the tank cars very soon. But if we do, we should be glad of your company, Mr. Stubbs."

"And disappointed because you don't get it, too, I hope," grumbled the war correspondent.

"I feel like you do, Hal," said Chester. "Much as I would like to go adventuring in one of those cars, I am afraid it will be many a long day before the opportunity presents itself."

But in this belief both lads were wrong; for the opportunity was to present itself before long; and Anthony Stubbs, in spite of protests, was to be along.

CHAPTER X

THE BRITISH ADVANCE

WITH Combles, a pivotal point, now securely in his hands, General Haig, the British commander-in-chief, determined to press forward once more. This time the object was to be Peronne, to the south and east, an important point because of its many railroads. With this point in his hands, the British commander felt he would be able to launch more effective and more concerted attacks against the Germans, besides which he would be in closer touch with the French army battling the German Crown Prince's attacks before Verdun.

So it was that upon the morning following the return of Hal and Chester to the British lines, General Haig gave the signal for the opening of the artillery bombardment that now had come to be the signal that an advance was to follow. All day the guns roared, pouring death and destruction into the distant German lines in the vicinity of Maurepas. Hastily the Germans fell to work re-constructing their trenches before the village, for they knew that the attack was coming.

Upon the following morning General Haig ordered his troops to the attack. Calmly and with decision, yet with no show of haste, the men poured from the shelter of their trenches and advanced; calmly, too, they moved across the open ground, while the German artillery dropped countless shells in their ranks. Over their heads as they went forward the heavy British guns continued to fire at the enemy.

Intermingled with the advancing infantry were squadron upon squadron of cavalry, while, farther back, came the field batteries, ready to swing into position at command and to occupy ground made available for them by the columns that went before.

In spite of the fact that men dropped on all sides, the British advanced slowly until they were within striking distance of the German trenches before Maurepas. Then the British artillery in the rear became silent; it could not fire now. Sharp bugle calls rang out along the first British line.

German heads appeared over the trenches and the foe opened with a volley of rifle fire. At a command, the British returned the fire; then advanced at the double.

There was no further firing from the British. In work like this it was the bayonet upon which the English depended.

Right up to the trench they rushed and clambered

in despite frantic efforts of the enemy to stay them. German reinforcements came hurriedly to the threatened point, and the hand-to-hand struggle raged with fury.

More men clambered into the trenches and the battle continued. There came the sharp crack of automatics as officer singled out officer and engaged him. Briton and German fell side by side, locked in a death grapple.

General Haig, accompanied by members of his staff, had ridden forward in the wake of the British advance. From a slight elevation he viewed the battle for the trenches. A grim smile lighted up his face as the British tumbled into the trenches. Hal and Chester stood close to him.

From time to time staff officers mounted horse or motorcycle and dashed to various parts of the field with orders from the British commander. Came a sudden cry of alarm from Hal, and General Haig gazed at him sharply.

"Over there," cried Hal, pointing to his right.

General Haig swept the field with his glasses. There, coming forward at a gallop, swept column after column of German Uhlans, coming in such direction as would cut off the advanced British troops from the main army. General Haig acted promptly.

"Paine! Crawford!" he commanded. "Order General de Lacey's horse forward at once!"

He turned rapidly and gave other hurried orders to members of his staff.

Hal and Chester were in their saddles almost before General Haig's words were out of his mouth. Putting spurs to their horses, they dashed toward General de Lacey's position, half a mile to the west.

General de Lacey stepped forward as the boys dashed up to him.

"General Haig orders you to advance in full strength," shouted Hal, and in a few words explained the situation.

General de Lacey returned the boys' salute quietly, and sprang to the saddle of his own favorite charger; and as he raised a hand, his bugler sounded an advance.

In almost less time than it takes to tell it, de Lacey's cavalry swept forward in its effort to intercept the German squadrons before they should succeed in their effort of cutting off the British who were fighting in the German trenches.

Other calls resounded from other parts of the field, and Hal and Chester, even as they advanced with de Lacey's forces, realized that General Haig had ordered a general advance.

De Lacey's columns swept forward at a gallop. Good riders, these men; none better in the British ranks. Armed with swords, lances and revolvers, many a man allowed the reins to fall loose on his

horse's neck while he guided him with his knees. Hands were made for fighting.

It had not been the boys' intention to accompany General de Lacey in his charge. Their posts, once their mission was accomplished, were at the side of General Haig; but so swift had been the advance, that the boys had been caught in the tide, and both realized now that it was practically impossible to separate themselves from the charge without bringing confusion in the ranks. So they charged with the others.

Both were excellent horsemen, and they now rode close together.

As they dashed forward, Hal whipped out his sword with his right hand, and dropping the reins, produced his automatic with his left. Chester smiled as he did likewise.

It had been many a long day since Hal and Chester had participated in such an action; though, earlier in the war, both had proven their mettle in hand-to-hand fighting. They found themselves now in the fourth line of advancing horsemen; and each realized that there would be hard work ahead. They determined to keep as close together as possible.

As the British swept forward in this grand charge, it was plain that it was an even break as to whether they would be able to intercept the German cavalry before it succeeded in cutting off the British in the enemy's trenches. Both parties were about

the same distance from the strategic spot. If the Germans arrived first, it would likely go hard with the British; if the latter arrived first they would be in time to save their companions.

Both British and Germans seemed to dash forward faster than before; and, as it transpired, both forces came to the selected spot at the same moment.

There was a crash as the first lines of horsemen met in the open, going at full speed. Horses and riders were hurled back; and many a man fell to the ground, where he was trampled to death by the plunging steeds.

A volley of small arm fire broke out over the field. Men slashed right and left with swords, and thrust with their lances. Heavy sabers circled high in the air and came down on unprotected heads. Horses screamed with pain. It was a hideous and terrible mingling of men and brutes.

The British stood more firmly under the first shock than did the Germans; and, realizing that he had won the first important step, General de Lacey, in the midst of the struggling mass, urged his men to even greater efforts. The British responded with a will, and gradually the Germans gave back.

Suddenly the Germans parted, leaving a wide opening in their center, as if by magic; and through this opening rushed fresh squadrons of the enemy and hurled themselves upon the British.

The British had been taken by surprise by this manoeuver; and under the crashing shock of this new attack, they were forced back, fighting desperately.

Now it became apparent that the German commander had detached part of his force and that a large body of Germans was making its way toward the trenches, where the hand-to-hand struggle for their possession was at its height.

Something must be done quickly. General de Lacey looked around. The two officers closest to him at that moment chanced to be Hal and Chester.

"Two squadrons and after them!" shouted the commander.

The lads needed no further instructions. As if by magic two squadrons of troopers fell in around them, and by a mighty effort, they burst through what few German troops blocked their way and dashed after the Germans, who, by this time, were in striking distance of the trenches.

In spite of the fact that the enemy outnumbered him, General de Lacey rallied his men with an effort and soon the Germans were slowly retiring before him. More reinforcements were on the way, and it became evident that the British would be left in possession of that section of the field.

But where Hal and Chester rode, with no support available at the moment, hard work was cut out. Not a man of the advancing columns but knew

it, yet they charged in the face of desperate odds, even as they had often charged before.

"At 'em, men!" shouted Hal.

The British troops fighting for possession of the German trenches were hard pressed. They fought doggedly against infantry in front and cavalry in the rear, but the odds against them were too great. Then, even as they would have surrendered, the two squadrons of British under Hal and Chester took the German cavalry in the rear. This gave the British infantry a breathing spell. They took it and turned on the foe with redoubled vigor.

The German cavalry wheeled to offer battle to this new foe. Without a pause the British threw themselves upon the overwhelming numbers of the enemy. The first line of Germans crumpled up and the British hurled themselves forward, their rush only slightly checked by the first contact.

The Germans had the advantage of larger numbers; the British the advantage of the charge. At first the British made progress, but gradually the Germans steadied and Hal and Chester realized that they were getting the worst of it. Hal conceived a daring plan. It was to burst through the German horsemen and join the British troops fighting in the German trenches. He raised his sword and shouted his command:

"Forward! Charge!"

CHAPTER XI

THE BATTLE RAGES

THE gallant British troopers needed no urging; all they asked was permission to throw themselves headlong upon the Germans who stood between them and their countrymen. Now that the word had been given, they urged their horses forward with loud yells and cries.

Hal and Chester, still keeping close together, were swept forward in almost the first line. Each lad flashed a sword aloft in his right hand, while with his left each held a ready automatic. No hand was needed to guide the horses they bestrode; these, as well as the men of the troop, breathed the smoke of battle, and seemed as anxious as their riders to get at the foe.

The force of the impact bore the Germans back, and before they could recover their poise, the English were among them. Their front thus broken, the first lines of the enemy were forced back upon those behind. For a moment it seemed likely that the British would be able to cut their way through on the first attempt.

But the German line, under hoarse commands from the officers of the troop, made an heroic effort, and the British charge was stayed.

Undaunted, Hal rallied his men with a shout and gave a second command to charge.

Again the British troop, its numbers considerably reduced, leaped forward at command. This second charge was more terrible even than had been the first. In vain the Germans tried to drive back their foes by throwing the weight of overwhelming numbers against them. This time the British were not to be denied.

Swords, sabres and lances flashed up and down, then up and down again, and as each fell there was always one less of the foe to be accounted for. Frequently a British lance or sabre went clear to the ground, but this was when the hand that bore the weapon fell to rise no more—it was when a German thrust or a German bullet went home.

The struggling mass of horsemen was so closely entwined now that it was hard to distinguish friend from foe, in spite of the difference in uniforms. Men cut, slashed and stabbed right and left, yelling at the tops of their voices. There were some few, however, who went at the work in hand more doggedly and quietly, but for the most part each combatant added his voice to the hideous din and confusion.

From time to time either Hal or Chester raised his

voice and called a command over the field of battle; and, in spite of the fact that the mass was so twisted that it all seemed confusion, at each command the British managed to regain some semblance of formation.

It was for this reason, perhaps, that they were at last enabled to break clear through the German lines.

At last Hal saw a chance for which he had been eagerly waiting. The Germans parted suddenly in front of him. With a sudden cry he spurred his horse forward. Chester was close behind him, and following Chester came the rest of the British troop. The Germans gave way before this rush and the British line broadened a trifle. Gradually it broadened more as the British continued to push forward. Chester drew up on even terms with Hal.

No longer were the swords of the two lads gleaming bright. They were colored now to a dull red; each one had done its work. The revolver of each lad was empty, but neither seemed to realize it, for he retained his clasp.

Chester's horse suddenly collided with that of a large German animal immediately ahead of him. The rider spurred to one side, thrusting with his sword as he did so. Chester threw up his left hand and caught the thrust on the barrel of his automatic. Before the German could recover and thrust again, Chester had reversed his weapon and hurled it at his

adversary's head. His aim was true, and struck squarely in the temple, the German threw up his hands and toppled from his horse.

At the same moment two German officers dashed upon Chester from directly in front. They separated as they came close, thinking to get him in between them. Chester caught the thrust of the man to the right with his sword, and returned the thrust promptly. The thrust went home.

The second German aimed a terrific slash at the lad, and but for the quick action of Hal, Chester's fighting days would have ended there and then. Hal did not have time to intercept the slashing blow the German officer aimed at his chum, but he succeeded in throwing his horse upon that of the German before the latter's blow could reach its mark, and thus spoiled the Teuton's aim.

Then, as the German drew back his arm preparatory to a thrust that would have pierced Hal had it gone home, Hal's horse reared and sprang upon the animal of the German officer. With both feet the animal came down upon the head of his four-footed opponent and the latter screamed in pain. Then the horse that Hal rode set upon the other with his teeth; and, as the animals fought, Hal and the German officer fought as well.

Several times the German was prevented from landing a death thrust by the antics of one of the horses. Several times Hal also was near to con-

quering his opponent only to have victory snatched from his grasp as one of the animals reared suddenly.

Hal's horse, evidently tired of fighting with his equine foe, abruptly gave up this line of attack and buried his teeth in the leg of the German rider. The latter uttered a howl of pain. It was the chance for which Hal had been waiting and the lad was not slow to take advantage of it.

With a sharp blow he struck the sword of the German from his hand, but he had not the strength to deliver the death thrust to an unarmed opponent. He stayed his hand. But the lad's mount had no such scruples. He still held the German's leg in his teeth, and now he pulled back. Down went the German to the ground, and with almost a human scream, Hal's horse jumped upon him.

The lad had no chance to prevent this, had such been his intention. The British behind him were pushing forward now and Hal was forced along whether or not.

All this time Chester had been hotly pressed by others of the enemy, who were raining blow after blow upon him; but, as by a miracle, the lad had not been wounded, and his horse had been able to retain its feet.

The Germans still fought stubbornly, but it would have been apparent to an onlooker that they were getting the worst of it and soon would be forced to

retire. Right in among them the British forced their way now, slashing and thrusting as they rode. It was more than flesh and blood could stand, and, in spite of the frantic cries of their officers, the enemy at last broke and fled.

A loud cheer arose from the members of the British troop who had survived this work of carnage; and from the British who still contested with the Germans ahead for possession of the trenches the cheer was returned. British yells continued to ring out over the field as Hal and Chester led their cavalry to the relief of the hard-pressed men in the trenches.

Out from their trenches now swarmed the Germans who had been engaged hand-to-hand with the British infantry. In spite of superior numbers they had been unable to hurl back what few English that had confronted them, and they were of no mind to try an encounter with reinforcements. This was the occasion for more British cheers.

From the British rear now came other troops advancing to the support of the hard-pressed men in the trenches. The Germans swarmed from the trenches faster than before. Quickly two English machine guns were rushed forward and opened upon the fleeing enemy. Germans fell in heaps. Others, realizing that escape was practically impossible, threw down their arms and raised their hands high above their heads in token of surrender.

These men were quickly surrounded by the British and marched to the rear, where they were turned over to other troops who now entered the trenches.

It had been a hard-won victory, but victory it was, as the British well knew. They knew, too, that the Germans realized they had been defeated at this particular point, but they were well aware of the fact that the battle was not over. It would be only a question of time until the enemy advanced in an effort to recapture the trenches so lately lost.

Therefore, under command of their officers, they fell to work in making their newly won positions ready for the assault that was to come soon, singing and whistling the while. Field batteries and more machine guns were hurried forward from the British rear, and everything possible was done to strengthen the recently acquired position.

Hal and Chester, taking a breath with the rest of the cavalrymen after the fighting was over for the moment, turned and surveyed the scene of battle.

"Some fight, that," was Hal's comment.

"Rather," agreed Chester dryly. "Pretty warm for awhile. I wasn't sure we would be able to break through."

"Nor I," said Hal. "Still I knew we must either break through or die."

"Or surrender," Chester interposed.

"Well, I hadn't thought of that."

"I hadn't either, to tell the truth. But I didn't—— Hello, what have we here?"

The lad broke off suddenly and surveyed a figure that came toward them. Hal broke into a laugh.

"It's only Stubbs!" he exclaimed.

"Only Stubbs, eh!" exclaimed the little man, who had overheard the lad's remark. "It may be only Stubbs right now, but I can tell you the time when I was greatly in demand."

"I was only joking, Mr. Stubbs," Hal apologized.

"Oh, it's all right," said Stubbs with a wave of his hand. "But I am going to get away from here, since you are in sight. You both mean trouble to me."

He turned on his heel. But Stubbs was not to get away without trouble, it developed. The trouble came a few moments later.

CHAPTER XII

ABOARD A "CATERPILLAR"

A BUGLE sounded suddenly.

Hal and Chester had been so absorbed in the appearance of Stubbs that they had taken their eyes from the distant German line. Now both looked in that direction.

Sweeping toward them—toward the trenches which the British had won at such cost and exertion—came the Germans in a charge. The mass of horsemen stretched out to either side as far as the eye could see.

"Great Scott! They must want these trenches pretty bad," muttered Hal.

"Looks like it," Chester seconded. "However, we seemed to want them pretty badly, too, when we came this way."

"Yes, but look at the number of them," cried Hal.

"Looks like there are too many to cope with successfully without still more reinforcements," agreed Chester.

From behind the swiftly approaching Germans,

the big guns opened upon the British in the trenches. The British field batteries and machine guns responded.

"Guess we'll try to hold 'em off as long as possible," said Chester. "Reinforcements may arrive in time."

"Come on, you fellows," said Stubbs at this juncture. "What's the use of standing here and being shot full of holes? I'm going to get out of here. Coming?"

"Not just yet, Mr. Stubbs," replied Hal. "We'll linger a spell. You toddle along."

"You bet I'll toddle!" exclaimed Stubbs, as a British soldier not ten feet away threw up his hands and dropped in his tracks. "You fellows had better come along with me."

He turned and took to his heels.

Chester and Hal picked up a couple of automatics each from the ground and resumed their places as before the British charge some time previous. The men greeted them with cheers.

"We'll stick here as long as possible, men," said Hal. "Then, if we are not relieved, we'll retreat. They are too many for us and there is no use dying if we can help it. One thing is sure, we don't want to be captured."

All along the line the British had now opened upon the approaching foe; but the Germans came on bravely in spite of a fire that did terrible execu-

tion in their ranks. As rapidly as gaps were made in their line they were filled up, and the Germans advanced as steadily as before.

Now they reached the trenches and hurled themselves upon the British in a hand-to-hand struggle once more. The latter fought back bravely, but the weight of numbers soon told and gradually the British were forced out of the trenches. They contested every inch of the ground, however, and retired slowly and in good order.

For some reason, the struggle in this particular section of the field seemed to have been overlooked by the British general staff; and the mere handful of men were left to fight it out alone. It appeared to be an impossible task they were facing, and so it would have been but for one thing.

The British had now retreated perhaps a mile, when suddenly Hal and Chester came upon an object that called exclamations from both. The object which their eyes beheld was nothing less than one of the new British armored cars.

"Wonder what it's doing here?" exclaimed Chester.

"Don't know," replied Hal, firing his revolver toward the foe. "It seems to be deserted, too."

"Strange," mused Chester. "Say, Hal, do you suppose you can run this thing?"

"Sure I can run it," said Hal, "providing the thing is not dry."

Chester glanced around. They stood at that moment in the open field, and men were dropping on all sides. The armored tractor stood alone in the open, towering above men and horses.

"It's about the only place a fellow can find around here that offers a refuge," said Hal. "If a fellow gets in there, he's safe unless they blow the thing up. Where's the entrance?"

They looked around.

"Other side, I guess," said Chester.

He was right.

"Here you are," he called a moment later. "Better bring half a dozen men. The thing may be O. K., and if it is we'll need men to man the guns."

Hal did as requested, and Chester climbed up. As he would have gone within, a revolver was suddenly poked in his face and a voice exclaimed:

"Stand back or you are a dead man!"

Chester stepped back in consternation. With the tractor standing idle, the last thing the lad would have thought of was that it might be occupied; but he realized that the situation was desperate, so he advanced again.

"Come out," he called. "You're surrounded."

"Don't care if I am," came the voice from inside. "I'm inside and you're out. I'm reasonably safe."

Chester gave a start. Surely he recognized that voice.

"That you, Stubbs?" he called.

"Yes, it's me," was the ungrammatical response.
"That you, Chester?"

"Yes; let me in."

"Come ahead."

Chester clambered rapidly inside. A moment later Hal also sprang in and half a dozen soldiers behind him.

"I say!" cried Stubbs. "The whole British army can't pile into this thing."

"There are enough of us here right now," said Hal.

He looked the car over carefully, and examined the tank.

"Full!" he ejaculated. "Wonder why the machine was deserted?"

"Crew probably stepped out to see what was going on and were shot," said Chester.

"Most likely," said Hal.

Bullets dropped harmlessly off the steel sides of the car. Those within could hear the patter as they struck.

"Guess they're getting close," said Chester. "We must hurry, Hal."

Hal gazed at the guns that protruded from the front and both sides of the machine. The ammunition boxes alongside were well filled.

"Everything shipshape," he said. "Chester, you're in command. "Tell off your gun crews."

Chester obeyed, and Hal took the wheel at one side

of the machine, so that a forward gun could have free play.

"I say!" exclaimed Stubbs at this moment. "What's going on here, anyhow?"

"Why, Mr. Stubbs," said Chester, "we're going to do a little fighting in a minute."

"What's that?" shouted Stubbs. "Fighting, with my car?"

"Your car, Mr. Stubbs," repeated Chester, as, under Hal's hands, the machine started slowly forward.

"Yes; I found it, didn't I?"

"Perhaps you did; but this machine belongs to the British government, and it is here for fighting purposes."

"Well, I didn't climb aboard for fighting purposes. I came in here because it was unoccupied and seemed to be a safe place."

"It's still safe, Mr. Stubbs."

"Yes it is—not," shouted Stubbs angrily. "Hey! You're going right toward the enemy. Don't you know that?"

"Certainly, Mr. Stubbs."

"Well, I demand that you turn about and make for the British lines. We may reach there safely."

"And leave all our poor fellows out there to be shot down, Mr. Stubbs? I know you wouldn't want that."

"Well," said Stubbs, "they would have the same chance of reaching safety that we would."

"But with us holding off the enemy, they will not be harmed," said Chester quietly.

"But what about us—or me, that's what I want to know," shouted Stubbs. "If I had thought you fellows would stumble upon this car I never would have climbed into it. I tell you, I want to go west and not east."

"Then you can get out and head west afoot, Mr. Stubbs," said Chester quietly. "This machine is bound east."

As he talked with Stubbs, Chester had kept his eyes glued to an opening in front of the car that gave him a view of the enemy.

"Evidently they're not afraid of this machine," the lad muttered. "They're coming right ahead."

It was true. The German cavalry were headed straight for the "caterpillar" car, firing as they came.

The machine rambled slowly along under Hal's guiding hand, for all the world like a gigantic turtle. It was perfectly immune from rifle bullets.

Behind the cavalry, Chester could now make out the infantry advancing in great strength.

"This is going to be pretty warm, if you ask me," he muttered.

He looked around the inside of the car carefully.

Every man was at his post. Chester gave a command to the man at the forward gun.

"Ready!" he cried. "Aim!"

"Hold on!" shouted Stubbs at this moment. "Let me out of here."

"You're too late now, Mr. Stubbs," said Chester quietly. "All ready," this to the man at the wheel again. "Aim! Fire!"

The "caterpillar" car rocked a trifle as the first gun spoke; but it went on as before.

Anthony Stubbs groaned.

"I'm a dead Stubbs this time, sure," he muttered. "Why didn't I stay in New York?"

He got as far back in the machine as he could, and made himself as small as possible in one corner.

"May as well be comfortable if I am going to die," he mumbled.

The "caterpillar's" gun boomed again.

CHAPTER XIII

THE "CATERPILLAR" GETS BUSY

"OPEN with the rapid firers!" exclaimed Hal, as the tractor moved slowly forward.

Chester gave the necessary command and a hail of lead swept the advancing Germans. Hal and Chester both watched keenly the effect of the first fusillade. It was terrific. Germans dropped to the right and to the left. Horses screamed and men shouted and groaned, as the animals dashed madly over fallen riders, crushing them.

"Good work!" Hal cried. "Keep it up, Chester!"

The rapid firers aboard the "caterpillar" car continued to pop; and toward whatever point the British aimed, there the foe fell in countless numbers. Still the Germans came on and the slovenly tractor moved to meet them.

And at the extreme rear of the tractor, Anthony Stubbs crouched, apparently in abject terror, and moaned:

"Oh, why didn't I stay in New York? Mrs. Stubbs, you'll be a widow before the sun sets. And

the poor little Stubbses, what will become of them?"

The little man threw himself full length in the bottom of the car. The British soldiers within eyed him scornfully. One, in moving, placed his heavy army boot upon the little finger of Stubbs' left hand. Stubbs let out a howl, and, unmindful that they were all in the midst of battle, aimed a blow at the soldier's leg with his fist. Then he jumped to his feet and confronted the man.

"Look here!" he exclaimed. "Why don't you look where you're going? That's my finger you stepped on, do you know that?"

The soldier made no reply, but stuck to his work. Stubbs grew even more angry.

"You big loafer," he cried. "I'll get even with you for that. You see if I don't. No man can step on me and not hear about it. What did you do it for, anyhow?"

He confronted the Briton, who turned at that moment to reach for more ammunition. It is doubtful if the soldier had even caught the import of Stubbs' words, but, turning now, he found the little man in his way. His hand shot out sharply and Stubbs staggered back against the rear of the car; then sank down.

He was up in a moment, though, and apparently was about to spring at his assailant; but Chester had caught his misfortune out of the tail of his eye, and now called sharply:

"Sit down there, Stubbs!"

The lad's voice was so sharp that Stubbs obeyed without a word.

The others now gave all their attention to the work ahead of them. In spite of the relative strength of their position, they were in a ticklish place, and not a man aboard who didn't know it. Capture or death seemed inevitable unless aid came.

The Germans surged forward like a sea. They seemed to be coming forward in huge waves as far back as the eye could reach. Rifles and smaller arms cracked and bullets rained upon the steel sides and top of the tractor. Volley after volley from the rapid-fire guns of the Teuton infantry struck the car; but the steel sides and top shed them like so much water.

But Hal knew and Chester knew that, further back among the foe's infantry, were guns of greater calibre—guns that, should they send a shell squarely home, would blow the tractor into tiny pieces.

A moment later something struck the car. It did no damage, but a trailing cloud of smoke was left in the wake. Chester sighted it first.

"Change course, Hal!" he cried.

Hal did so instantly; then called to Chester:

"What's the idea?"

"Smoke bomb struck us," returned Chester. "They had the range. The next shot would have been an explosive."

The lads had seen enough of the war to know in what manner the gunners found the range. It would be too expensive to hurl valuable shells in to find an enemy's range, so that work is now done with what are termed smoke bombs. As soon as the range had been established, an explosive shell follows. Striking a solid substance, it usually results fatally.

The European war had already proved the utter uselessness of fortifications and all solid substances when opposed to heavy explosives. It was the boast of the Germans that, in the destruction of the turtle forts of the Belgians and French, never more than a single shell from one of the great 42-centimetres had been necessary to accomplish its destruction. Smoke bombs pointed out the way, and a single huge shell did the rest.

"We'll have to be mighty careful, Hal," called out Chester. "You'd better shape a zig-zag course. It may help some."

Hal nodded his agreement to this plan and followed Chester's advice. The result was to give the tractor even more of a caterpillar-like appearance as it crawled forward.

The rapid-fire guns aboard the armored car were not idle for a moment as the handful of British and the surging sea of Germans drew nearer and nearer each other. The foe had suffered heavily as the tractor moved forward, but so far there had been no casualties aboard the tractor.

Now the German cavalry, which had been showing the way, veered sharply to the left and rode away.

"They're going to leave us for the infantry to settle," said Hal.

"Right," agreed Chester. "They have come to the conclusion that we are perfectly safe so far as they are concerned. They're right, too, for that matter."

"Well, we'll have a crack at the infantry then," said Hal grimly.

He moved the lever over a notch, and the speed of the "caterpillar" car increased a trifle.

"Give 'em fits, men!" he cried.

The British soldiers needed no urging and already were doing their utmost along that line, but they raised a low cheer at Hal's words.

"They're separating, Hal," cried Chester at this juncture.

It was true enough, as Hal made out at a quick glance. A platoon of infantry, comprising probably two hundred men, had borne off a trifle to the south.

"They're trying to surround us," said Hal. "We'll advance a little further and try and give the British foot a chance to get out of harm's way; then we'll try to get back ourselves."

"It can't be done," grumbled Stubbs, from his sitting posture.

Hal took no notice of Stubbs, giving his entire

attention to the manoeuvring of the tractor, which still continued to zig-zag its course along.

A bugle sounded from the German lines. At the signal, perhaps a hundred men sprang forward at the double and swept down upon the tractor.

"Going to rush us, eh?" said Hal.

He smiled grimly to himself. He did not alter the course of the car.

Right up to the side of the car the Germans dashed.

"Depress your guns, men," said Chester quietly, as the Germans surrounded the car.

The men obeyed. A minute later Chester commanded:

"Fire!"

The deadly hail of the rapid firers swept the Germans who had come close to the car. Twice the guns moved from right to left and from left to right again. Then it was all over. There were no more Germans near the car. The tractor continued to move forward as though nothing had happened.

Directly ahead was what appeared to be a ditch. It was perhaps five feet wide, and Hal could see that it was very deep. Into the lad's mind now came Stubbs' account of the ability and accomplishments of the "caterpillar" cars. There was a little doubt in his mind, but he had decided on a certain course and it was characteristic of him that he did not hesitate now.

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The car advanced to the very edge of the ditch; and then, as the Germans gave a cry of exultation, seeing apparent destruction ahead of the car, the tractor wobbled right across the ditch. Hal thanked his stars that Stubbs had not misinformed him. The tractor had simply laid its own track across the ditch, and it picked it up when it was across.

As the British poured in volley after volley now, the Germans ahead gave vent to startled cries. It seemed to them that they had witnessed a miracle. They hesitated in their advance, halted; and then, in spite of frantic cries of their officers, turned and moved back whence they had come.

There was none more surprised than Hal and Chester. The lads could hardly believe the evidence of their own eyes

"Great Scott! What do you think of that?" Chester ejaculated.

"It's queer," returned Hal. "They've seen these things in action before. Wonder why they should have been so surprised?"

"I'll tell you," said Chester after reflecting a moment. "These are probably fresh troops. Chances are they have encountered no motor cars before."

"I guess you've hit it," agreed Hal. "Well, it's lucky for us."

There had come a cessation in the German fire. Chester glanced back.

"Hey!" he cried to Hal. "Those who passed us

are coming back. They're headed dead for us."

"Well," said Hal quietly, "I guess we have given the troops enough time to get to safety. We'll swing about and meet these fellows."

"But then the others will be after us," said Chester. "We can't hope to outrun them in this thing."

"The best we can do," replied Hal, "is try."

The armored motor car swung about in a wide circle.

CHAPTER XIV

STUBBS TAKES A HAND

"HAD enough fighting for this time, Mr. Stubbs?" asked Chester with a smile.

"Enough and to spare," returned Stubbs with feeling. "I've had enough fighting to last my descendants for the next million years. In fact, I had had enough fighting before I had any fighting."

"Well, we're going back now," said Chester.

"Thank the Lord for that," said the little man. "It's all over, eh?"

"Oh, we may have to fight a little to get there," was Chester's response.

Stubbs groaned.

"By George! won't we ever get to a safe place?" he exclaimed. "I knew there was something wrong or you wouldn't be so happy. What did you want to go and get my hopes raised for?"

"I simply told you we were going back toward our own lines, Mr. Stubbs," said Chester.

"But why didn't you tell me the worst part of it first? That's what I want to know."

"I simply wanted to cheer you up a bit."

"You did," said Stubbs dryly, "and then you went and spoiled it."

"Don't worry, Mr. Stubbs," Hal called. "We'll get back safely enough."

"Oh, no we won't," was the little man's rejoinder. "I'll probably be shot a few times first."

"Stubbs, you're a natural born croaker," said Chester.

"Maybe," said Stubbs, "but there is one thing you and Hal are that I'm glad to say I'm not."

"What's that?"

"Well, there is an old saying about 'fools run in where angels fear to tread.'"

"You mean to call me a fool, Mr. Stubbs?"

Stubbs shrugged his shoulders.

"Take it any way you like it," he returned.

"Now look here, Stubbs," said Chester, feigning anger, the while keeping his eyes on the Germans ahead, "don't you call me a fool or I'll have you pitched out here."

"Oh, no, you won't."

"Won't I, Hal?"

"What is it, Chester?"

"You heard what this little war correspondent called us?"

"I heard it," said Hal grimly.

"Shall we heave him overboard to the Germans?"

"It wouldn't be a bad idea," said Hal.

"All right, then, we'll do it."

"Hold on there," said Stubbs. "You're not going to throw me out. You know I was only fooling."

"You have a mighty poor way of fooling, then," said Chester. "I've a notion to drop you out anyhow."

"No, no," said Stubbs. "Don't do that. I take it all back. I——"

A cry from Hal interrupted him.

"Fire, men," he cried.

The tractor now had come close upon the Germans who had managed to get between them and their own lines, and the foe was bearing down upon it as the tractor waddled forward.

The few British aboard opened again with their rapid firers; the Germans gave ground, leaving many dead upon the earth.

"Keep it up, men," ordered Chester.

The guns continued to spit fire and the Germans to give way, as the tractor advanced. Then, suddenly, the guns aboard the caterpillar car became silent.

"Fire!" called Chester.

"No more ammunition, sir," said one of the gunners quietly.

Hal and Chester uttered exclamations of alarm; and the latter glanced back.

"And they are coming upon us from behind, too!" he exclaimed.

"I told you," said Stubbs. "I told you something was going to happen."

"Silence, Mr. Stubbs," said Chester sharply. "What'll we do, Hal?"

"Just keep going," said Hal quietly. "These fellows ahead can't hurt us any. Their rifle fire can't stop us. Besides, we can make just as good time as the artillery in our rear. We'll get through. Keep away from the portholes, men, and we are all safe enough."

He sent the big tractor forward as fast as it would go. The Germans ahead poured harmless rifle volleys at the car, but the cessation of fire from the tractor did not draw them closer.

"Funny they don't come up alongside," muttered Chester.

"No, it's not," said Hal. "They figure our silence is a ruse to get them closer so we can mow them down. I suppose they'll venture closer presently, though."

For a time, however, it seemed that the lad was wrong. The Germans remained at a considerable distance from the car, meanwhile firing from the distance. Behind, too, the enemy made no effort to come close, contenting themselves with following at some distance. Hal continued the zigzag course, and the foe had not yet been able to get the range with their big guns.

"They won't stay off there forever and let us go

our way in peace," said Chester perhaps five minutes later.

"I don't suppose they will," Hal agreed; "but I can't figure any way for them to stop us unless they blow us up."

"Maybe they'll get together in a mass and stop us," said Chester.

"I guess not," said Hal. "This car is too powerful for many thousands of them. Of course if they have enough, they could stop us, but many would be crushed."

"They are likely to try it, anyhow."

"I don't think so."

"What do you think they will do then? You don't expect them to let us go our way unmolested?"

"No. They will probably try to break in. But the door is strong and should hold unless shattered by an explosion. If they had dynamite they could fix us."

"Evidently they haven't, or they would have used it a long time ago," said Chester.

Hal nodded.

"That's my opinion," he agreed.

The answer was to come soon. From the rear came galloping horses. .

"Something up," said Chester.

"Well, they can do no more than they have done," said Hal. "Bullets won't hurt."

But this, it transpired, was not to be the method of attack.

As the horsemen came closer, Hal made out that the man in the extreme center bore something that was neither sword, rifle or pistol. He peered closer, but could not make out what the man held.

Hal looked at his automatics. They were empty. Chester followed his example. There was not a cartridge left. Hal spoke to his men.

"Any bullets?" he asked.

The men shook their heads.

Hal shrugged.

"Guess it doesn't make any difference," he said. "We'll just push along. They can't hurt us unless they bring up their big guns."

The tractor waddled along as before. Hal and Chester, meantime, kept an eye on the approaching horsemen.

"By Jove!" exclaimed Chester suddenly.

"What's the matter?" demanded Hal.

"Matter is," said Chester quietly, "that the man in the center there is armed with several sticks of melinite. They're going to blow us up."

"Are you sure?" exclaimed Hal, greatly perturbed.

"Certain," said Chester quietly. "Chances are they will call upon us to surrender, and if we refuse it will be all off."

"It would be wise to surrender then, sir," said one of the soldiers.

"I suppose you are right," Hal agreed. "However, we'll keep going until the last minute. I hate to think of going back to a German prison camp."

"What's that about going back a prisoner?" demanded Stubbs at that moment.

Hal explained.

"I'm not going back," said Stubbs firmly. "If they get me back there they'll shoot me as a spy. No, sir. I'm not going back."

"But we may have to surrender, Stubbs."

"Not me," said the little man.

At that moment the Germans galloped close, and one man raised a hand, demanding their attention.

"Surrender!" he called in a loud voice. "Surrender or we shall blow you up."

He motioned to the man who carried the melinite and the latter rode to his side.

"What shall we do, Hal?" asked Chester.

"We'll have to give up," was his chum's quiet response. "I hate to do it, but——"

He shrugged his shoulders expressively and checked the speed of the car. But before he could reply to the German's hail, Stubbs entered the field of activity.

From his pocket the little man suddenly produced a revolver—the only loaded weapon aboard the caterpillar—and stepped quickly to one of the port-

holes. Before the others could stay him, had such been their intention, Stubbs poked his weapon through the hole and pulled the trigger.

Followed a terrible explosion, and the motor car rocked crazily. Before the eyes of its occupants a cloud of smoke arose. It was at the spot where a moment before had stood the man who threatened their destruction. When the smoke rolled away the riders were gone.

"Take me back and shoot me, will you?" exclaimed Stubbs. "Well, I guess not!"

CHAPTER XV

STUBBS AS A HERO

FOR a long moment there was silence aboard the "caterpillar" car. Then Hal sent the tractor forward again. He did not speak. The deliverance of all aboard from German hands had been so sudden that for a moment he could think of nothing to say. Not so Chester.

"Stubbs," said the latter, "don't you know it's not ethical to fire at the enemy during a parley?"

"Ethics," said Stubbs quietly, "make me sick."

"But it's against the rules of civilized warfare."

"I didn't make any such rules," declared Stubbs, "and, therefore, I'm not bound by them."

"But custom has——" began Chester.

"Look here," Stubbs interrupted, "did I save us from those fellows or didn't I?"

"Yes," Chester admitted. "You did that all right, but——"

"Then what are you kicking about? You should buy me a medal for saving your life or your liberty

as the case may be. You're the most finicky person about the manner in which you have been saved that I ever saw."

"But you don't get the point, Stubbs. It's altogether——"

"Maybe I don't get the point, but if I had waited for you fellows to act I would have got blown up. That's what I would have got. I'm better satisfied this way. Look out for Number 1, that's my motto. Move just a little bit ahead of the other fellow. I learned that rule before I was a day old on the *New York Gazette*. When we get back to New York I'll get you fellows a job there for a few days. It might do you good."

"Don't let him make fun of you, Mr. Stubbs," said Hal at this juncture. "You did perfectly right, to my mind. We had entered into no parley with the enemy. They approached at their own risk."

"It wouldn't have made any difference to me if we had entered into a parley," said Stubbs. "I wasn't even thinking about ethics. I was thinking of safety, that's all."

"Well, it was quick thinking, Mr. Stubbs," said Hal. "It has undoubtedly saved us from capture at any rate; perhaps death."

"You had better put in a little more time running this craft, and not so much to talking," said Stubbs. "We're not safe yet."

"Oh, yes, we are," said Hal, smiling. "If you will

take the trouble to look ahead, Mr. Stubbs, you will see British troops headed this way."

Stubbs looked ahead. Then he uttered a cry of delight.

"Hooray!" he shouted.

Coming forward at a rapid gallop were half a dozen squadrons of British cavalry, and farther back the infantry could be seen approaching. The Germans ahead of the tractor were hurrying rapidly forward in an effort to reach their own supports before being cut off.

They came directly toward the tractor, apparently in no wise afraid of it now.

"They know we're out of ammunition," said Chester. "Wish we had a few rounds. They'd either surrender or stay here on the field."

"I've still got a few shots here," said Stubbs.

Again he approached a porthole in one side of the tractor, and poking the weapon through, emptied it at the Germans.

No man fell.

"You should have rested on your laurels, Stubbs," said Chester dryly.

Stubbs turned on him angrily.

"What do you mean by that?" he demanded.

Chester smiled.

"Come now, Stubbs," he said, "you don't tell me that your fortunate shot a while ago was anything more than an accident."

Stubbs' face turned red.

"I aimed at him, didn't I?" he demanded.

"Well, to tell you the truth, I don't think you did," replied Chester.

"Why—why—why——" stammered the little man.

"It was just luck, if you ask me," said Chester.

"An excellent shot, yes, but just—luck."

Stubbs threw his empty revolver to the floor of the car with a bang.

"I wish I could have saved myself and let the Germans get you," he cried. "I tell you I took careful aim at that fellow before I pulled the trigger."

"Perhaps so," said Chester.

"How do you figure I hit him if I didn't aim, eh?"

"Well," said Chester, "I said something about luck."

Stubbs shut his lips tightly and stared at Chester. Then he said slowly:

"Now that's what I call gratitude."

"Ha! ha!" laughed Hal. "That's the time he got you, Chester."

It was Chester's turn to flush, and his face turned a dull red.

"Don't think I'm not grateful," he said to Stubbs.

"It was a quick act cleverly executed. I was just joking. Indeed, I am grateful to you, Mr. Stubbs."

"Well, you have a deuced queer way of showing it," Stubbs growled.

"Come, don't be angry, Mr. Stubbs," said Chester. "I meant no harm, I assure you."

Chester extended a hand, and, after some hesitancy, Stubbs grasped it warmly and smiled.

"Oh, that's all right," he said. "I knew all the time you were joking."

The Germans now had passed beyond the "caterpillar," and the British horsemen had drawn close. A moment later they pulled up beside the car. Hal stopped the tractor and all within dismounted. Not one of the crew had been wounded.

The leader of the squadron extended a hand to Hal and Chester.

"You made a gallant fight, sirs," he said. "From far back we could see that you were in a serious predicament when accosted by the German cavalryman. We took it that he carried an explosive and the blast later confirmed our belief. Were we right?"

"You were, sir," said Hal.

"We came as quickly as possible," continued the officer. "I must congratulate you upon the manner in which you disposed of the enemy and upon your safe return."

"Here is the man who did it, sir," said Hal, and thrust Stubbs forward.

The officer looked at him.

"But he is no soldier," he protested. "How came

it that he was with you, and who is he, anyhow?"

"This," said Hal with a low bow, "is Mr. Anthony Stubbs, of New York, war correspondent of the *New York Gazette*, sir; and what news he cannot find on the field of action, he finds in his imagination."

"That, Colonel," said Stubbs, "is not true and he knows it. It is true that I saved my friends here and myself. We were in a ticklish position, I assure you, and I realized that it was time for me to do something rather than leave it to younger and more inexperienced men. That's why I acted as I did, sir."

Stubbs spoke so quietly and his air was so sincere that the British officer was plainly impressed.

"It was a magnificent action, sir," he returned, "and I am glad to meet so gallant an American. Your hand, sir!"

Stubbs, nothing loath, extended his hand, and the British officer shook it heartily.

"I shall be glad to mention your gallantry in my report, sir," he continued. "Such service shall not go unnoticed and unrewarded. It shall be called to the attention of Sir Douglas Haig, sir."

Stubbs blushed like a boy under all this praise.

"I did nothing much, sir," he said. "It was just my good fortune to think quicker than the others, sir."

"By Jove!" said Hal to Chester. "What do you

think of that, eh? And he has convinced the colonel, too."

"We shall go no farther now, sirs," said the colonel to Hal and Chester. "If you will follow with the tractor, I will see that you are conducted immediately to General Fullerton, who may have other work for you. Mr. Stubbs, I have promised myself more of your company. You shall dine with me, sir. It may be that I can be of service to you." He turned to an orderly. "A horse for Mr. Stubbs."

The orderly saluted and dismounted, offering his own horse to Stubbs.

The little man gazed at Hal and Chester with a lofty smile. To the colonel he said:

"I shall be pleased to accept your invitation, sir."

He mounted.

The British officer gave a command to his men and motioned to Stubbs to ride beside him. He was about to give the signal to march, when Stubbs stayed him.

"A moment, sir, if you please," said the little man. "I would speak a word with my friends here."

"Certainly, sir," said the colonel. "As long as you like. I shall await you."

Stubbs rode his horse toward where Hal and Chester stood open mouthed at all that had happened. The little man grinned down at them.

"You see," he said in a low voice, "I am the hero

here this time. Now, there is one thing that I would like to impress upon both of you. It may help you some day."

"And that?" asked Chester faintly. He was too surprised to say more, as was Hal also.

"That," said Stubbs, and he pitched his voice still lower, "that thing is that you can go a long, long ways on a good bluff. Think it over."

He wheeled his horse and was gone.

Chester and Hal looked at each other blankly for some moments. Then both smiled.

"Well," said the latter finally, "he ought to know."

CHAPTER XVI

ON A NEW MISSION

"My information differs considerably from what you have told me," said General Haig.

Hal and Chester flushed a trifle.

"I hope, sir——" Hal began.

"Now don't get excited," said General Haig with a smile. "I do not intend to accuse you of untruthfulness. What I do mean to say is that, in the report you have just made to me, you have not done yourselves justice. It was a gallant feat you performed, my lads. It shall not be forgotten."

"Thank you, sir," said both boys with a salute.

"And now," said the general, "if you lads are not too tired and still have a desire to serve England further, I have more and important work that I shall be glad to entrust to you."

"What is it, sir?" asked both lads eagerly, almost in one voice.

"Now, don't get impatient," laughed General Haig. "All in good time. Come to my quarters an hour from now."

He turned on his heel and moved away.

The day upon which this conversation took place was the one following the return of Hal and Chester to the Allied lines. They had made their reports and then sought a much needed rest. In the morning, they had resumed their places as members of General Haig's staff. It was just after Hal had returned from a quick dash to a division farther to the east that General Haig had accosted both lads with the words that open this chapter.

"Wonder what's up now?" asked Chester, as they made their way to their own quarters, where they would get a change of clothes.

"Don't know," returned Hal. "Something important, though, I'll wager. Say, Chester, the general seems to think a lot of us."

"He certainly does," agreed Chester; "but I'm impatient to know what he has for us to do this time."

"Keep your shirt on," laughed Hal. "You'll know soon enough."

The two boys made their way to General Haig's quarters at the appointed time. General Haig was busy with a mass of papers at his big desk when they entered, so they stood at attention before him. The British commander motioned them to seats at the far side of the room, and then again became immersed in his work.

For perhaps an hour the lads sat quietly; then

Chester began to fidget. Hal nudged his chum with his elbow, and both sat quietly again.

An hour passed, and then, just when it seemed to Chester that he could sit quiet no longer, General Haig raised his head and called them to approach.

"You are all right," he said as they stood before him. "You both seem to have learned one of the most important qualifications for a soldier."

"And what is that, sir?" asked Hal.

"Patience," replied the general briefly.

Chester smiled in a little embarrassed manner.

"I'm not so sure, sir," he said. "I was getting a bit fidgety a moment ago."

"I saw that," said General Haig. "But you seemed to have been able to master your impatience, and that is a rare accomplishment; more rare, perhaps, than patience itself."

Chester bowed slightly, but made no response. Both lads waited anxiously for the British commander to give them an inkling of the work ahead of them.

"Peronne," said General Haig at last, "lies to the southeast. You know the general lay of the land in these parts, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir," said Hal.

"Good! As you probably are aware, the real objective of our drive along the Somme has been, after Combles, Peronne. Possession of Peronne will give us an open way into the heart of French

territory now held by the Germans. If we are to make progress before winter sets in, we must have Peronne. Do I make myself clear?"

"Perfectly, sir," replied Hal and Chester in a single voice.

"All right. Now, the capture of Peronne by straight driving blows against the enemy might be accomplished; but it would be accomplished at such loss of life that it is not to be thought of—not, at least, at this time. If we hope to wrest Peronne from the foe it must be by strategy rather than by force. Now you understand the situation."

The lads did not reply, but waited for General Haig to continue. After a slight pause, the British commander did so.

"In Peronne," he said, "is a man by the name of Andrews. At least, that is his English name. The last word that has come to me about him is to the effect that he is now known as Herr Blough, and is representing himself to be a subject of the Netherlands—a Dutchman. Of course he must have assumed this alias immediately upon the German occupation of the town. Otherwise he would certainly have been discovered. This man Andrews—or Herr Blough—is an agent of the British government. He has been gaining valuable information, and, I trust, has ingratiated himself with the foe. I want you to find him."

"Where in Peronne does he live, sir?"

"I don't know," was General Haig's response. "To find him should be the hardest part of your work."

"And after we find him, sir?" questioned Hal.

General Haig smiled.

"You seem pretty confident that you will succeed in your search," he said.

"Of course we shall find him, sir," said Hal quietly. "That is, if he is alive, sir."

"Well, I hope he is still alive," said General Haig quietly. "If he cannot be found, it will make our work the harder."

"Can you give us a description of him, sir?" asked Chester.

"Unfortunately," replied General Haig, "I cannot. I have never seen him. But you can identify him by this."

From his pocket General Haig drew a small piece of cardboard. It was of a peculiar bluish tint, and was about an inch square.

"Andrews will have a card similar to this," he said.

"All right, sir," said Hal, "we shall find him some way, sir—and at the earliest possible moment."

"Very good," said the general. "Now I want to caution you against too great haste. It is true that the matter should be attended to without delay, but too great haste often makes for carelessness. A slip, once you are beyond the German lines, would spoil

the whole thing—and would very probably mean your lives.”

“Then there shall be no slip, sir.”

The general eyed the two boys keenly.

“You are brave lads,” he said quietly at last, “but it will be well to keep this piece of cardboard out of sight. You must remember that while most of the civilian population of the city is friendly to us, there will still be enemies there. Should a German official chance to see that little piece of cardboard it might fare ill with you.”

“Then we shall keep it out of sight, sir,” said Chester.

“That’s all, then,” said General Haig. “I suppose that you will discard your uniforms for the trip?”

“Yes, sir. We couldn’t do much good this way,” said Hal with a smile. “However, we cannot approach the foe’s lines until after dark, so we have plenty of time.”

“Once again I enjoin you to caution,” said General Haig sharply. “Most boys are impetuous. I believe you are not. That is why I have chosen you for this mission.”

He looked at them closely a full moment; then turned on his heel and strode away.

Hal and Chester again made the way to their own quarters.

“Well,” said Chester, sitting down on his cot,

"nice little job we have on hand, isn't it?"

"Not such a little job as you seem to think," returned Hal. "I don't know how big Peronne is, but you can take my word for it, that it's ticklish business hunting a man you don't even know by sight, when you know that a little slip will stand you before a firing squad."

"Well, I guess the town is not so big that we can't cover it pretty thoroughly in a few days," declared Chester. "Something will turn up in our favor. It always does. At all events, we'll find Andrews."

"Yes, we'll find him; and then what?"

"By George! General Haig didn't tell us," exclaimed Chester. "He must have forgotten. We shall have to ask him."

Hal smiled slowly at Chester.

"Hasn't it occurred to you," he said, "that General Haig knows what he is about?"

"You mean——" began Chester.

"Exactly," returned Hal, seeing that Chester had caught the import of his words. "The general knows that we will follow whatever instructions Andrews has for us."

"Guess you're right, Hal," said Chester. "At any rate, we won't bother the general any more."

"And now," said Hal, "arises the matter of how we are going to get beyond the German lines."

"We've done it before," said Chester. "Guess we can do it again."

"All right. How?"

"What's the matter with an airplane? We can get rid of the identification marks in a couple of minutes. We can elude the foe in the air; and then, when the time comes to come down, we can have an accident. What do you think?"

"Guess that is as good as any other way," replied Hal after a moment's reflection. "We'll try it. We can get a machine without any trouble. Now, let's discard these uniforms."

CHAPTER XVII

WITHIN THE ENEMY'S LINES

It was night. Dark clouds floated through the sky when Hal and Chester climbed aboard their aircraft and soared into the air. Hal was at the wheel and Chester sat behind.

"Guess we'd better make a slight detour, Chester," said Hal. "They probably will be on the lookout for British craft in this direction."

"In that case we'd better go north a bit, then shape our course anew when we are above the foe," Chester declared.

"Guess you're right. I'll do that."

The machine veered sharply. After an hour's flying Hal again changed his course and headed due east. They encountered no other craft aloft. After perhaps another hour's sail, at a rather slow speed, Hal turned again and headed toward the south.

"If we're not interfered with we should raise Peronne within two hours," he said.

"Here's hoping we are not interfered with," said Chester.

And they were not.

Hal brought the machine lower after awhile, and as they flew along closer to the ground kept his eyes ahead for lights that might indicate the presence of a town below. At last his efforts were rewarded.

"Must be Peronne if my calculations are right," he said to Chester.

"What'll we do?" asked Chester. "Go closer, or come down here."

"I believe we had better come down here. If we can find a suitable place, we'll hide our plane. It may come in handy later."

Hal suited the action to the word and gradually the aircraft neared the earth. Under Hal's firm hand it came to rest upon the ground with the slightest tremor. Both boys scrambled out and looked around.

It was pitch dark, which fact stood the lads in good stead. For a moment Hal debated with himself. At last, with a shrug of his shoulders, he produced a small pocket flashlight and pressed the button.

The ground was lighted up for a short distance ahead. Chester uttered an exclamation.

Instantly Hal released the pressure on the button and dropped a hand to his pocket, where rested one of his two revolvers.

"What's the matter?" he demanded in a low voice. "Somebody near?"

"No," replied Chester. "I just happened to see a pile of brush not fifty feet ahead. Seems to me

that would be a good place to hide the airship against future needs."

The two lads walked forward and investigated. They found what indeed was a good hiding place. They walked back to the machine and laid hold of it. Under their pushing and pulling it finally was dragged in among the pile of brush.

Hal stepped back and flashed on his pocket light.

"Can't hardly be seen now," he said. "However, it's just as well to take no chances. We'll heap some more of this brush on it."

This was the work of a few moments; then the lads stood off a bit, and with the aid of Hal's flashlight, examined the spot where they had hidden the craft.

"I don't believe anyone can find it unless he knows what he is looking for," said Chester.

"Or unless he stumbles upon it by accident," Hal added. "Well, we may as well be moving toward Peronne."

"We're not sure yet that it is Peronne," Chester cautioned his chum.

"You may not be," said Hal, "but I am. I am positive I made no error in my calculations."

"Let's be moving, then," said Chester.

They started off through the darkness in the direction of the town, whose lights could be dimly seen twinkling in the distance.

At the edge of the town an hour later, Hal stopped a moment.

"Just want to get my bearings," he said to Chester, who inquired into the cause of the stop. "We've got to remember where that airship is, you know."

"That's right," Chester agreed. "Guess I would have gone on without thinking of that if it hadn't been for you. We seem to be north of the town, and a trifle to the east."

"Right," said Hal. "I'll bark a tree here so that in the event we return in a hurry, we won't have to spend too much time hunting our direction from here."

He drew a knife from his pocket, and did as he had said.

"Guess we can see that by daylight," he said. "Anyhow, it's the best we can do. I don't want to make it too conspicuous. Somebody might take a notion to investigate. Now for Peronne."

The lads strode swiftly through the darkness. A walk of a few minutes brought them to the edge of the town, and they moved on down a street that led directly eastward. After ten minutes more walking they bore off to the left.

"This should take us somewhere near the middle of the town," said Hal.

"And when we get there, then what?" demanded Chester.

"Well, I should say the first thing is to see if we can find a place to put up for the night."

"By the way," said Chester, "who are we supposed to be, anyhow?"

"Why," said Hal, "I forgot to tell you, didn't I?"

"I don't know whether you forgot or not, but I know you didn't tell me."

"I arranged all that," said Hal, "while you were out hunting an airship."

"All right, then. Who are we supposed to be?"

"War correspondents," said Hal quietly. "I've prepared a couple of papers that should pass muster. Since knowing Stubbs, I have learned a few things. I am sure these will work."

"But they have not been countersigned by a German official."

"No, but they have been countersigned by a British official."

"Great Scott! You don't mean to tell me that you have done a fool trick like that. What good is a British countersign in the midst of the German army?"

"I'll explain. Of course, it was impossible for me to have papers prepared with a German countersign. But even a British countersign will prove to the satisfaction of the Germans that we are war correspondents. Besides, the very audacity of the plan will insure our safety. Of course we shall have to have some German officer scrawl his name across

the paper before we will have the freedom of the town. We'll have to convince him—whoever he may be—that it will be to his best interest to do so."

"And may I ask," said Chester, "what paper we chance to represent?"

"The New York *Gazette*," replied Hal calmly.

"Great Scott!" cried Chester again. "What would Stubbs say?"

"As to that, I neither know or care," replied Hal. "He's safely on the other side. I guess it wouldn't hurt his feelings any. But caution now. I think we are coming to some place."

"Funny we haven't bumped into a sentry or something," Chester whispered.

Hal nodded in the darkness, but made no audible reply.

They walked more slowly now, until they came at length to a street corner where were gathered a knot of men. The lads approached them.

"Can you tell us where we can find a place to spend the night?" Hal asked of a man, in French.

At sound of the voice the man started sharply. Then, recovering himself, he exclaimed:

"You took me by surprise, speaking French as you did. Don't you know German is the only language permitted spoken in public here?"

"No, I didn't," replied Hal. "You see, we have just arrived."

"Just arrived? And from where, may I ask?"

The British lines," replied Hal quietly. "We are newspaper men."

Again the man gave a sudden start.

"All right," he said finally. "I suppose your business is your own. We have had war correspondents here before, but they didn't stay very long. However, they pay well, and I may as well have the money as another. Follow me."

The lads asked no questions, but followed the man along the street. After a ten minutes' walk, which took them quite a distance from the center of the town, their guide stopped before a comfortable looking house.

"Just a word of caution," he said. "Of course, you can see that I am a Frenchman. But, hereafter, speak naught but German—that is, if you can."

"Thanks," said Chester. "We shall follow your advice."

The man led the way into the house, which proved to be just as cosy and comfortable inside as its outward appearance had indicated. A pleasant-looking French woman came forward.

"This," said the man, "is my wife, Madame Tulliers."

Hal and Chester introduced themselves by their own names, which were truly American. They believed they would be safer than assumed names.

The French woman greeted them pleasantly.

"I hope you do not mind children," she said.

"We have five—three boys and two girls."

"Not in the least," said Chester with a smile. "I like them."

"So do I," agreed Hal.

The woman conducted them to a room on the second floor and then departed, saying she would prepare something to eat. The two boys smiled at each other.

"Guess we are fixed all right," said Chester.

Hardly had the words left his lips when there came the sound of loud voices below and footsteps ascended the stairs.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE SEARCH BEGINS

HAL thrust a hand into his pocket and quickly produced several papers. He glanced at them quickly, and then passed one to Chester.

"What's this?" Chester wanted to know, but he took the paper.

"That's your identification as a war correspondent of the *New York Gazette*," returned Hal. "Put it in your pocket quick. I guess we are going to have callers."

Hal was right. The lads had hardly stowed the papers in their pockets when there was a rap at the door.

"Come in," Hal called.

The two chums took their stand at the far side of the room, facing the door. The door swung open in response to Hal's invitation, and three German officers strode into the room, hands on the hilts of their swords, which sent forth a loud jangle as they stepped into the room.

"What can we do for you, sir?" asked Chester in German, of one of the officers.

"Who are you?" demanded the officer.

"Chester Crawford, sir, war correspondent of the *New York Gazette*. My friend here is Hal Paine of the same paper."

"How do I know you are what you represent yourselves to be?" demanded the officer.

"Because we say so, sir," declared Hal, with offended dignity.

The officer took no notice of the lad's apparently injured feelings, but asked sharply:

"Where are your papers?"

Hal drew from his pockets the paper he had prepared with such care. Chester followed his example, and they extended them to the German officer. The latter glanced at them closely, and then stepped back with an exclamation:

"These bear only the signature of the British general, Haig," he said. "Of course you know they are no good in our lines."

"We haven't had time yet to present them to your commanding officer here," Hal explained. "We had figured upon doing that in the morning."

"I fear it will do you no good," said the officer with a slight smile. "As it happens, I am in command here. I am Colonel Buettner. I would have you tell me why it is not my duty to have you both shot as spies?"

"For one reason, Colonel," said Hal quietly, "because we happen to be what we represent ourselves

to be. To tell the truth, we were so anxious to get here that we didn't take time to ask safe conduct. Had we waited, of course, there would have been no trouble. I am sure you can see that that is reasonable enough."

"Reasonable enough, yes," said Colonel Buettner, "but how am I to know it is the truth?"

Hal shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, I don't suppose I can convince you if you will not take our credentials as evidence," he said.

The German considered a moment. Then he said:

"If I were positive you are not what you represent yourselves to be, I would have you shot immediately. Even now the only reason I hesitate is because if you were in truth American newspaper correspondents, you may do much for me and for the German cause if you will."

"We shall be glad to do anything within reason, sir," said Chester.

Again the German considered.

"I'll tell you what I'll do," he said at length. "You will remain here under guard all night and I'll go into your case further in the morning. It calls for deeper thought. You look young for the positions you claim to hold, but I have learned that age is not always required for success nowadays."

"Whatever you say, sir," Hal agreed.

"Good. I shall have a guard placed around the

house. I need not tell you that for you to venture out will mean death."

"We're smart enough to know that, I guess," said Chester with a smile.

"I'm glad you are. All right. I'll call again some time in the morning."

The colonel bowed low and retired, his fellow officers with him. The moment the Germans had gone, Hal looked at his watch.

"Morning," he said with a laugh. "Wonder what he calls this? Three o'clock now."

"Great Scott! I had no idea it was so late!" exclaimed Chester. "Guess we had better try and catch forty winks."

"I'm with you," said Hal. "That bed over in the corner looks inviting."

"Any bed looks inviting when a fellow's tired," Chester said. "Let's climb into it."

A few moments later they were fast asleep.

The boys were awakened when it seemed to each that he had scarcely closed his eyes by a knock at the door. From months of the rigors of war, both lads were wide awake instantly.

"Wonder if the colonel has come back already and caught us in bed?" asked Hal.

"Don't know," said Chester. "We'll see." He raised his voice and called: "Who's there?"

"Tulliers," came the reply. "May I come in?"

"Come ahead," said Chester. "The door's unlocked."

Tulliers entered. In one hand he bore a tray, on which were two steaming cups of coffee and several pieces of bread.

"I was afraid you would oversleep and not be up when Colonel Buettner returned," he said, as he deposited the tray on a small table. "Otherwise I would not have disturbed you, for I know you must be tired out. Here is some coffee the madame sent you, and some bread. That's about all there is. Food has not been any too abundant since the Germans entered Peronne, so you'll have to make the best of the bread. If there are any eggs or anything like that hereabouts, they go to the German troops. The civilian population gets what is left."

"We are not what you would call fastidious in the matter of food," laughed Chester. "We have been in the war zone too long for that. That bread and coffee look pretty good to me."

"And to me," agreed Hal, jumping out of bed. "I'm going to drink the coffee first and wash and dress afterwards."

"You wouldn't if your mother happened to be here," said Chester with a grin.

Hal grinned back at him.

"If there is one thing that will make it taste exceptionally good, it is the fact that I know I shouldn't do it," he said.

"Ha! Ha!" laughed Tulliers. "I can see that you are nothing but boys after all. I'll leave you now while you dress. I would advise you to hurry. It is after eight o'clock and Colonel Buettner may return at any moment."

The two boys wasted no time after Tulliers had taken his departure. They disposed of the bread and coffee in jig time and set about making themselves presentable, pending the arrival of the German commander.

Tulliers' prophecy proved correct. It was not half an hour later that there came a resounding blow on the door.

"I recognize that knock," said Hal in a low voice. "It's a German trait the world over—that pomposity. You can tell a German any place by his knock."

Chester nodded and called:

"Come in!"

Colonel Buettner entered, this time alone, this fact in itself giving the boys confidence at once, for they both knew that had he decided against them he probably would have been accompanied by other officers, and, more than likely, by a squad of soldiers.

"Good morning," the German greeted them. "I trust you rested well?"

"Very well, your excellency," said Hal. "May we venture to hope the same for you?"

The colonel was plainly pleased by the title Hal

had bestowed upon him. Hal saw that he was not used to being addressed in such manner—he was only a colonel, though in command of the town—and he decided that a little flattery, if not too apparent, would not go amiss.

"I thank you," said the colonel. "I rested well, indeed. Now we can get down to business."

Hal and Chester nodded their assent, but made no audible reply.

"I have decided, after some thought," said the colonel, "that you are what you represent yourselves to be. You do not have the look of spies—you conduct yourselves too well for that. I shall give you the freedom of the town, but I warn you that you shall be watched. If it transpires that I have done wrong to trust you, you will be arrested before you have had an opportunity to work mischief. Be assured of that."

Again the lads nodded, but made no reply.

"Now, in return," said the German, "I ask that, in the reports you send to your paper, you say nothing detrimental to the German cause—nothing that might indicate a food shortage, nor that will in anywise reflect upon German arms. As you know, we are seeking the moral support of the neutral countries, and anything that your American papers print to our credit, is bound to help. Do I make myself clear?"

"Perfectly, your excellency," said Chester, taking

a cue from Hal. "I assure you we can promise that much."

"Then it is settled," declared the German. "Here are your papers which I took with me last night. You will find them satisfactory, I believe."

The lads took the papers and put them in their pockets.

"Now," said the colonel, "I shall leave you. I shall be glad to see you at my headquarters at any time I am not too busy."

He bowed again and left the room.

"Thank goodness that's over," said Hal, when he was sure Colonel Buettner was out of earshot. "Now, we may as well get out and get busy at once. We have no time to lose."

The lads made their way from the house and walked off down the street. The search for "Andrews" had begun in earnest.

CHAPTER XIX

AN ADVENTURE

"WELL," said Chester as they walked along, "how do you figure we are going to find Andrews?"

"I don't figure we are going to find Andrews," replied Hal quietly.

Chester looked at his friend in surprise.

"What's that?" he demanded, scarcely believing he could have heard aright.

"I said we are not looking for a man by the name of Andrews. The party we want to find answers to the name of Herr Blough, if you will remember."

"That's right," said Chester, smiling a bit sheepishly. "I hadn't thought of that. Well, then, how are we going to find Herr Blough?"

"I suppose we shall have to ask some one," replied Hal.

"Won't that arouse suspicion?"

"I don't know. We shall have to trust something to luck. Certainly we can't walk around and pick him out, never having seen him."

"Who will we ask?"

"That's a harder problem. We'll pick out some

harmless appearing citizen who looks as though he wouldn't talk too much. And, by Jove! I believe here comes such a looking individual now."

Chester gazed in the direction Hal indicated. Shambling toward them was a man small in stature, his clothing bearing evidence of hard usage. He stooped a trifle, but there was something about his carriage, nevertheless, that told the two boys he was no beggar. As the man drew close, Hal approached him.

"I beg your pardon, sir," the lad said, "but I am seeking information concerning one Herr Blough—first name unknown."

The man stopped and looked at the lad closely.

"Herr Blough?" he repeated. "What Herr Blough?"

"I have said I don't know his first name," Hal replied.

"What do you want of him?" the man demanded.

For a moment Hal was at a loss how to answer this question. Certainly he could not afford to reveal the nature of his business with Herr Blough. Hal hesitated a moment, and then took his decision.

"I am asking the questions, my friend," he said. "Can you tell me where I can find Herr Blough?"

"I am asking questions, too," returned the man, "and if you cannot tell me why you desire to see Herr Blough, then I cannot tell you where to find him."

"But if I were to tell you?" questioned Hal.

"I would not tell you either," and the man moved off. After he had gone a few steps, he halted and called over his shoulder: "I don't know where you could find him, anyhow."

He walked on again.

"That last remark," said Chester, "is a lie."

Hal nodded.

"Of course," he said. "He is afraid he has said too much. I am convinced he knows something of the man we seek. I wonder if it would be well to follow him?"

"Not now, I am afraid," said Chester. "He will be expecting that, and we could have no success. No, I should say it would be futile to follow him. At some other time, however, we can trail him when he has not seen us. We might be fortunate enough to learn something then."

"I guess you are right, Chester. The trouble is we can't take the risk of asking questions promiscuously. If we do, word of our actions is sure to come to the ears of Colonel Buettner, and then we will be in for a grilling."

"What shall we do then?"

"We'll look about the town a bit. Maybe something will turn up."

Noon found the lads still strolling about, taking in all that was possible for them to see. Said Chester suddenly:

"I'm getting hungry. What do you say if we stop in this little shop and get a bite to eat?"

"Suits me," returned Hal. "I can feel a little cavity in my own anatomy."

Accordingly the two lads entered the shop and took seats in a far corner. They ordered from the deferential shopkeeper the best the place afforded, and sat back patiently to await its arrival.

While they were engaged in conversation, two other figures entered the shop and took seats at the table next to the two boys. The lads glanced at them as they sat down, but gave them no further attention. The men were German officers. Lieutenants, their shoulder straps proclaimed. A few moments later a third officer joined them. The three gave their orders.

Suddenly Hal and Chester again had their attention called to the three German officers. Apparently the three were engaged in some sort of an argument. Their voices rose louder and louder.

"If they keep that up there is going to be a fight," Hal whispered to Chester.

"Looks like it," Chester whispered back. "We'll stay and see it out, eh?"

Hal nodded silent agreement; and the lads watched the Germans without apparently taking any notice of them.

"I tell you you are wrong," said one of the officers in a loud voice. "He said nothing of the kind."

"I say he did," responded a second.

"That's not true."

"What! you mean to call me a liar?"

"If you want to take it that way, yes."

"Smack!"

This was the next sound. The second officer had risen suddenly in his seat and before the other could realize his intention had slapped the first speaker across the face.

There was an angry roar from the other as he jumped to his feet, sending the table to a far corner of the room with a kick of his heavy boot.

"You'll answer for that!" he cried, and whipped out his revolver.

"Whenever you say," replied the other, who also had drawn a weapon.

For a space the men stood, with drawn revolvers, eyeing each other angrily. The third member of the party stepped between them.

"Gentlemen!" he exclaimed. "You must not fight. His majesty has enough to do and few enough men to do it, without losing one of you. Or if you must fight, let it be in a manner that will prove serious to neither of you."

"What do you mean by that?" demanded both the others.

"Why," said the third member of the party, "as you know, I spent several years in the United States. There I learned a few things about what the Ameri-

cans call boxing. You fight with your fists—so,” and the German lieutenant put up his hands in approved style, feinted once or twice and then drove his right fist toward an imaginary adversary.

“Humph,” said one of the Germans. “That is child’s play.”

“Maybe you think so,” said the other; “but when you have a man opposed to you with two arms, you won’t say so. Now what do you gentlemen say? Will you try my way, or must I report this matter to Colonel Buettner?”

For a moment the others hesitated, each waiting for the other to speak. Finally the man who had struck the blow said:

“I am agreeable if Lieutenant Holstein is.”

“All right,” said that worthy, “but I warrant I shall give Lieutenant Barnhardt a severe beating. Where will we fight?”

“Right here,” said the self-appointed master. “I shall have our host clear the room. Now each of you should have a second to instruct you.” His eyes swept the room and he seemed to notice Hal and Chester for the first time. He crossed to their table. “You gentlemen have, of course, heard the argument and know what is about to transpire,” he said courteously; “and I perceive you are Americans and know something of boxing. Can I prevail upon you to second my friends here?”

Hal and Chester rose to their feet.

"We shall be pleased," replied the latter.

"Very well," said the German. "You," indicating Hal, "shall second my friend Lieutenant Holstein, and you, sir," pointing to Chester, "shall second my friend Lieutenant Barnhardt."

The lads gave their names to the German lieutenant, who now introduced himself as Lieutenant Viering. He, in turn, introduced both lads to the prospective combatants. At his instruction, the host cleared the room and produced a piece of chalk, with which Lieutenant Viering drew what in America is commonly termed a "squared circle." Then he explained the rules of boxing to the two opponents.

The men listened attentively, while Hal confided to Chester.

"My man will give your man a good thrashing."

"Not much, he won't," returned Chester. "I'll give him a few pointers and what he'll do to the other fellow will be a plenty."

Hal and Chester now entered eagerly into the spirit of battle, and each sought to give his principal a few pointers. The men listened respectfully enough, but they were too eager to get at each other to give heed to what the lads said.

Lieutenant Viering had explained that the men would fight three-minute rounds. They had agreed that honor would be satisfied at the termination of

the bout. They stripped to their shirts and stood awaiting the word.

"Go!" said the self-appointed referee, gazing at his watch and stepping back out of harm's way.

CHAPTER XX

NOT ON THE PROGRAM

THE German lieutenants needed no urging. With arms flying about like flails they went toward each other with a rush. If either had harkened to the words of advice offered by Hal and Chester it was not apparent now.

Lieutenant Holstein landed the first blow. It was a wild swing that caught Lieutenant Barnhardt alongside the right jaw. The latter staggered back, and the former, evidently surprised, stepped back also.

"Go after him!" Hal shouted to his man. "Go after him before he can recover."

But Lieutenant Holstein still hung back. Lieutenant Barnhardt staggered clear out of the improvised ring and clapped a hand to his injured jaw. There was a drop of blood on his hand when he removed it. At sight of this, he let out a roar and charged his opponent, hands down.

The latter gave back at sight of this spectacle coming toward him, and Chester cried encouragement to his principal. Lieutenant Holstein put up his

hands in an attitude of defense, but a smashing blow from his opponent broke down his guard and landed flush on his nose.

In vain Chester sought to urge his man on, now that he seemed to have the advantage. Lieutenant Barnhardt seemed as surprised by the result of the blow as Lieutenant Holstein did by the effect of it. The men stopped, lowered their hands and looked at each other.

"This is a warm fight, Chester," called Hal from his corner, and added: "I don't think."

"Looks like a love feast," Chester replied. "I thought they wanted to fight."

Now neither lad had spoken with an idea of angering the combatants; in fact, neither had thought what effect his words might have. But the effect was a surprise.

Lieutenant Holstein turned angrily upon Hal, his second.

"Do you mean to say we are afraid to fight?" he demanded.

"Oh, no," said Hal. "I see, though, that you won't fight."

Lieutenant Holstein took a quick step toward Hal.

"I don't know much about this kind of fighting," he said, "but I'm willing to wager my next pay that I can beat you at it."

"You'd lose," said Hal quietly.

The German looked at him closely. Hal stood fully three inches beneath him in stature, and it was perfectly apparent that should they come to handgrips Hal probably would get the worst of the encounter.

Lieutenant Vierung and Lieutenant Barnhardt had been eyeing Hal and Lieutenant Holstein carefully. Now the former stepped forward and laid a hand on Holstein's arm.

"You forget," he said. "These gentlemen have simply volunteered to help us out."

Lieutenant Holstein shook off the other's arm. In his mind he knew that he did not wish to continue the fight with Barnhardt, for while it was possible that he might beat the other down, Barnhardt was about of his size and strength, and had the same chance. But Hal he looked upon as easy prey. So he said:

"This gentleman," and indicated Hal, "has questioned my courage. I now demand that he stand up against me. I shall attend to Lieutenant Barnhardt later."

Lieutenant Vierung smiled to himself. He saw by Hal's attitude that the lad was not a bit afraid, and he drew his own conclusions concerning the young American's prowess with his fists. He shrugged his shoulders.

"Very well," he said. To Hal he added: "I, of course, shall second my friend. I presume that your

friend will be glad to second you, if you wish to engage Lieutenant Holstein."

Hal bowed.

"I wish to say that I am not entering this fight because I am angry or anything like that," he said, with a smile. "I shall just give your friend a little lesson, and then I am sure we shall all be good friends."

"I'll watch this fight," said Lieutenant Barnhardt, who had caught Lieutenant Viering's smile, and was shrewd enough to know that Hal would not enter such an apparently uneven conflict if he was not pretty sure of the outcome.

Hal and Lieutenant Holstein accordingly took their corners. Chester could see that Lieutenant Viering was doing his best to tell his principal whatever he knew of the boxing art. Although Chester had no doubt of the outcome, he spoke a word of caution to Hal.

"Keep away from those wild swings," he said. "If one landed you probably would take a trip to dreamland."

"I'll watch them, don't worry about that," said Hal with a grin.

"Another thing," said Chester, "don't hurt him. It might prove embarrassing."

"I'll be careful," Hal promised.

Hal and Lieutenant Holstein now entered the improvised ring and Lieutenant Barnhardt, elected

as timekeeper, called for the fight to begin.

As in the first encounter, Lieutenant Holstein advanced with a rush and aimed a smashing blow at Hal. His fist encountered nothing but air, and before he could recover himself, he felt a light tap just above his left ear. Hal had side stepped neatly and struck as Holstein passed him.

The German recovered himself and wheeled about. Hal was right there ahead of him, but just out of reach. Hal feinted with his right fist, and as the German threw up an arm to ward off the blow, Hal struck him a light left in the stomach. The German bent quickly forward, although the pain from the blow could not have been great, and Hal took advantage of that to put his right against his opponent's chin with a little greater force.

Holstein roared angrily, threw wide his arms, and advanced, seeking to catch Hal in a wrestler's grip. But Hal was not there when the German's arms closed; and Holstein wheeled quickly as Hal tapped him over the right ear.

"Stand still and fight!" Holstein ordered, as Hal danced around him.

"I'm doing very well, thanks," laughed Hal, darting in suddenly and putting his right fist against Holstein's forehead before the latter could raise an arm to ward off the blow. Before the man could retaliate, Hal was out of reach again.

Lieutenant Barnhardt was so interested in this

performance that he forgot to look at his watch. Chester rushed out and grabbed him by the arm.

"Time's up," he cried. "First round is over."

Lieutenant Barnhardt, thus brought to himself, announced calmly that the first round was over. Hal returned to his corner, but Lieutenant Viering found it necessary to enter the ring and seize his man by the arm. The latter had followed Hal when it seemed that the lad was retreating.

Lieutenant Holstein was breathing heavily; still, when time was called for the second round, he opened the second as he had the first, with a wild rush. The result was the same as before. Hal was not there. In vain the German tried rush after rush. He could not get close enough to strike a blow, while Hal, after avoiding each blow, stepped in and out quickly, delivering sharp rights and lefts to any exposed points—and there were lots of them.

Suddenly Hal lowered his hands and stepped back.

"Don't you think we had better call this off?" he asked pleasantly.

Lieutenant Holstein's answer was an angry roar, followed by a rush, quicker than any he had yet attempted. He caught Hal a glancing blow on the jaw and the lad staggered slightly. He recovered himself quickly, however, and spent the remainder of the round keeping out of the way of his opponent without trying to fight back.

"How do you feel?" asked Chester, somewhat

anxiously, during the breathing spell that followed.

"Oh, I'm feeling right enough. But I'm going to land him a good one this time."

Before Chester could reply time was called again. Hal advanced quickly to meet the rush of his opponent, ducked two wild swings, and then fainted three or four times with lightning-like rapidity.

Lieutenant Holstein was completely bewildered. Then Hal shot a hard right to the point of the German's jaw. Holstein staggered back. Hal followed him closely. Another right he drove to the jaw, then a left, and then still another right, with force.

Holstein staggered back and crumpled up on the floor. Instantly the others bent over him.

"Knocked him out," said Chester. "You shouldn't have done that, Hal. I am afraid we are in for it now."

"Can't help it," said Hal. "He made me mad."

Slowly Holstein opened his eyes. He took in the faces above him and then got slowly to his feet. His eyes rested on Hal.

"You are a great fighter," he said after a pause. "Here I am almost twice as big as you and you knock me unconscious."

"Knocked you out, as we say in America," said Hal with a smile.

For a moment the expression on the German's face was a picture. Then he smiled.

"Well, I bear you no ill will," he said, and ex-

tended a hand. "It's my own fault. I should have known I couldn't beat you at your own game." He turned to Lieutenant Barnhardt. "I hope you will overlook anything I have said or done, my friend," he said.

Lieutenant Barnhardt grasped the hand heartily.

"Of course," he said.

"Now," said Lieutenant Holstein, turning again to Hal, "I wish you and your friend to dine here with us. What do you say?"

"We shall be indeed pleased," said Hal, with a low bow.

And thus ended an episode that threatened, for a time, to end unfortunately for the two lads. As Chester said afterwards:

"It was more good luck than good judgment that it didn't."

CHAPTER XXI

THE SEARCH CONTINUES

AFTER a substantial meal, Hal and Chester bade their newly made friends good-bye and continued their tour of the town.

"Well, we've had a little excitement, but I don't see that we have accomplished much," said Chester.

"Nor I," Hal agreed. "What shall be our next step?"

"Well," said Chester, "we seem to be losing time. We shall have to ask a few more questions, regardless of consequences. That's the only way I can think of."

"I guess you're right. Here comes a likely looking citizen now. We'll try him."

The man stopped deferentially when the boys accosted him. Apparently he was an inhabitant of the town.

"Can you tell me where we will find Herr Blough?" asked Hal.

"What do you want with him?" the man inquired.

It was the same question the other man had propounded, and again Hal was at a loss for words. But his hesitation was only momentary.

"I'm sorry I can't tell you," he replied, "but I would see him on a very important matter."

The man gazed at Hal closely a moment; then asked:

"Are you a German?"

"Why, no," said Hal. "Surely you can see that. My friend and I are Americans."

"And you say that it is upon a matter of importance that you desire to speak to Herr Blough?"

"Of the utmost importance," replied Chester.

Again the man gazed closely at the two lads. At length he said:

"I cannot tell you at this moment where to find Herr Blough, but if you will be near the home of Madame Herrin tonight at 11 o'clock you may learn something of him."

"But where is that?" asked Hal.

"I can say no more," was the reply, and the man walked on.

"Not very satisfactory after all," said Chester, as he and Hal resumed their walk.

"I should say not. Still, it is a little. We should have little difficulty locating the home of Madame Herrin. We'll be there at 11 o'clock."

"Do you think he could have been trying to throw us off the track?"

"That thought had entered my mind. There is no way of telling without being on hand."

"But it may be a trap," Chester protested dubiously.

"Hardly," said Hal. "No matter if the man mistrusted us, he would hardly go to Colonel Buettner with his story. Apparently he's a native. I don't believe he has much love for the Germans."

"That's true, too. Then the best thing we can do is find out where Madame Herrin lives and be there at 11 o'clock tonight."

"That's my idea. And in the meantime it would be well if we asked no more questions. We'll trust to this one clue to lead us to Andrews."

"Herr Blough, you mean," corrected Chester.

"Right," Hal agreed with a smile. "I think, though, that we may inquire the way to Madame Herrin's without rousing suspicion."

"We'll try. Here comes another man now. We'll ask him. I see that he, too, is a native."

Hal put the question when the man came abreast of him.

"Four blocks to the right, and then turn to your left. It is the last house on the left hand side of the street in the seventh block," was the reply.

Hal thanked the man and the lads continued on their way.

"We might as well walk by there and get an idea of the lay of the land," said Chester. "Some

knowledge along that line may come in handy to-night, you know."

"A good suggestion," said Hal.

Accordingly the lads followed the directions given them by the man they had accosted. A few moments later they passed what they took to be the house.

"Looks perfectly harmless," said Hal, as they re-passed the house, a two-story frame structure, on their way back.

"Yes, it looks harmless enough," agreed Hal. "I'll tell you what, though. We'll be here at 10.30 instead of 11 o'clock. Word that we have been asking questions will have been passed along before night. If they figure we are working in German interests, they may spring a trap on us."

"But we could explain," Chester protested.

"Perhaps," said Hal. "Maybe they wouldn't give us a chance."

"I guess you are right, Hal. It's best to be on the safe side."

"You bet it is. We'll come early and secrete ourselves some place and take stock of anyone who goes in or comes out. Then we will perhaps know how to act when the time comes."

"All right," said Chester. "I guess your plan is as good as another. At any rate, I do not have a better one to offer."

"All that we can do then is to wait," said Hal.

"Shall we return to our home or look around a bit more?"

"To tell the truth, I feel like taking a nap. We didn't have a whole lot of sleep last night, and we may have rather a strenuous time this evening. We'd better prepare for it, at any rate."

"Whatever you say. I could snooze a little bit myself."

The lads returned to the home of Madame Tulliers and repaired immediately to their rooms, in spite of the good woman's insistence that they must have something to eat. They lay down and were soon fast asleep.

It was after dark when Chester opened his eyes. He jumped up quickly, struck a match and glanced at his watch. It was 8 o'clock. He aroused Hal.

"Time to get up," he said in answer to Hal's muttered protests at being disturbed. "We've a good three hours yet, but we want a bite to eat first."

"No hurry," said Hal, and would have turned over and gone to sleep again; but Chester prodded him gently in the ribs.

"Come, now," he said. "You used to act like that when we were going to school, but I thought you had outgrown it."

Thus adjured, Hal set up. Chester, meanwhile, struck a light. Hal got out of bed and began to dress.

Half an hour later the two lads descended the stairs quietly and were soon walking down the street. They saw a light in Madame Tullier's room as they passed, but apparently she had not heard them go out. They returned to the little restaurant, the scene of their afternoon adventure, and ate heartily.

Chester again glanced at his watch.

"Half past nine," he said. "We still have an hour to kill."

"To tell the truth," said Hal, "I believe we had better get there before half past ten. There might possibly be other arrivals about that time, and we don't want to show ourselves until we are sure that everything is all right."

"We'll make it 10 o'clock, then," said Chester.

"All right; and to be on the safe side, we'll make a detour and come to Madame Herrin's place from behind."

"Suits me. We'll have another cup of coffee, then, and wait here until 10 minutes to 10."

This matter decided, the lads sat quietly sipping their coffee until the time for action arrived. Then they arose, paid their check and left the restaurant.

The boys avoided the street down which they had gone that morning, but walked along the thoroughfare next to it. They followed the same procedure when they turned into a cross street. They walked two blocks beyond their destination, then

turned, and came slowly back along the street upon which Madame Herrin lived.

Twice figures loomed up ahead of them, and each time the lads shrank back into the darkness alongside the row of houses.

"Can't be too careful," Hal whispered.

"Are your guns ready?" asked Chester.

"All right," whispered Hal. "And yours?"

"O. K., too. I hope we shall not need them, but it is just as well to be prepared."

"Right you are," said Hal. "By the way, where did I put that piece of cardboard? I can't seem to find it."

"Are you losing your mind? You put it in your hat."

Hal took off his cap and explored its interior in the darkness.

"That's right," he said with a faint chuckle. "It's still here, all right."

They were now a short distance from Madame Herrin's home. Still perhaps twenty yards away, Hal saw that a thick hedge surrounded the house next door. He conceived a plan instantly.

"We'll climb over here," he whispered.

"And be shot as burglars if we are discovered," added Chester.

Hal shrugged his shoulders.

"Can't be helped," he said quietly. "We'll have to risk something."

With some difficulty and no little noise the two lads scrambled over the hedge and made themselves comfortable behind it. Dimly they could see the steps to Madame Herrin's home.

"Guess this will be all right," whispered Hal.

"Hope so," said Chester. "Now for a long wait."

But the wait was to be much shorter than either lad had anticipated. Perhaps five minutes later a form came down the street. In front of Madame Herrin's house it stopped and remained silent a moment. Then the figure ascended the steps.

It was too dark for either lad to make out the man's features.

"That's one," whispered Hal. "There will probably be others. We'll remain quiet awhile."

Ten minutes later a second figure hove in sight.

CHAPTER XXII

CAUGHT

THE second figure stopped and looked quickly around as had the first. Although Hal and Chester were unable to make out the man's features, there was something familiar about him. After the man had entered the house, Hal mentioned the resemblance to Chester.

"I noticed it, too," Chester whispered back, "but I can't place the man."

"Nor I."

The boys became silent again. From time to time other figures appeared, stopped a moment or two and looked carefully around and then entered the house. Hal and Chester counted ten men in all. Then, for fifteen minutes by Hal's watch, which he glanced by the flare of a match, sheltered by his hand, no other figure appeared.

"Well, it's after 11 o'clock," he said. "I don't suppose there is much use of our waiting around here. Any one of the men who entered the house may have been Andrews, or I should say Herr Blough, but we have no means of knowing which."

"What do you suppose is going on in there?" asked Chester.

"It's too deep for me," Hal admitted, "but I imagine it is something the German authorities would give a whole lot to know."

"Then we should have nothing to fear from them," said Chester. "They would be friends and should welcome any assistance we would be able to give."

"They should," Hal agreed, "but the chances are they wouldn't. They would probably take us for foes and make short work of us."

"But Great Scott! Herr Blough may be in there, and he is the man we have come to find. We can't go away without learning something."

"No, I suppose not," Hal admitted slowly. "But at the same time, I fear that we are putting our necks in danger."

"Well, we'll have to take a chance; that's all there is about that," said Chester.

He got to his feet and scrambled across the hedge. Hal followed him. Chester walked up the steps to the door of Madame Herrin's house.

"Shall I knock or shall we try to get in unobserved?" he asked.

Hal turned the question over in his mind.

"I don't know," he said at last.

"Well, it stands just like this," said Chester. "If we get in unobserved they won't know we are there."

We stand a chance of getting out again, should we wish, without being seen. If I knock they may let us in, but there is nothing sure, as you say, that they will let us out again. I vote in favor of going in without knocking, providing we can get in."

"All right; then we'll go in that way," Hal decided.

Chester tried the knob. The door was locked.

"We won't go in this way without knocking," he whispered.

"Then we'll try a window in the back of the house," said Hal.

Quietly the lads slid around the house. There they found three windows, each within easy reach from the ground. The first two were locked, but the lads had better luck with the third, which opened easily and went up without a sound. Chester lent Hal a hand and the latter scrambled in. Chester followed.

Inside the room was nothing but darkness, so far as the boys could see. Chester felt around for a door. At length his hand, moving along the wall, touched wood. It was a door. A moment later Chester found the knob.

"Careful," he whispered, and turned the knob gently.

The door opened without a sound.

The boys found themselves in a long hall. They could see dimly by a faint ray of light which filtered

into the hall from a door slightly ajar near the front of the house.

"They are probably in there," whispered Hal, and led the way toward the slightly open door.

Chester followed close at his heels. Both lads walked on tiptoe and their progress was without a sound. They came at length to the door and Chester, stooping low, peered in. There was no one in the room.

Chester was surprised. He had fully expected to see the men who had so recently entered the house within the room. Hal peered in also.

"Guess we'll have to go a bit farther," he whispered.

"Looks like it," Chester whispered back.

Chester stepped within the room. Hal was at his heels. The hands of both rested on their automatics. They felt that they should be among friends, but neither had any intention of taking chances.

They moved across the room to a door beyond. Chester applied his eye to the keyhole. Within he caught sight of several figures. The sound of voices came through the door.

"They are in here, all right," he said to Hal. "What shall we do now?"

"Can you hear what they are saying?" demanded Chester.

Chester listened attentively a few seconds.

"I can catch a phrase now and then," he said. "I heard something about the Kaiser, and the British, and French, and soon."

"Let me try," said Hal.

He moved closer to the door and Chester stepped back a bit.

"Then we shall be free within the month?" said one voice.

"It looks that way," said another.

"Let us sincerely hope so," from a third.

Hal stepped back, and drew Chester across the room.

"They are friends, all right," he said. "Now the question is, shall we walk in boldly or not. They may believe our story or they may take us for German spies. If they believe us, they probably will tell us where we can find Herr Blough. If not, they won't."

"We'll have to take the chance," Chester decided. "We know they are friends and we must convince them that we are, too. Let's go in."

Nevertheless, before opening the door, each lad again made sure that his revolvers were ready, for they did not wish to be taken at a disadvantage.

"Open the door quickly," said Hal. "We'll take them by surprise. Then if any one makes a hostile move, we'll cover them with our guns until we have explained."

Chester nodded his understanding of this. He

laid a hand on the knob, turned it gently, and then threw wide the door.

Instantly all was confusion in the room beyond.

"Stand where you are," cried Hal, and produced his two automatics, with which he swept the room.

Chester also produced his weapons, and the lads moved into the room side by side, and braced against the wall.

The hands of the dozen men in the house were all in the air.

"Now, gentlemen," said Hal, acting as spokesman, "you will please keep your hands elevated until I have finished speaking. I'm a pretty good shot, and a hostile act means a bullet. Which of you is Herr Blough?"

He swept the room with his eyes. There was no reply. Suddenly Hal gave a start. He had recognized the figure that had looked so familiar to him when the man entered the house. It was none other than their host Tulliers.

"In the first place," Hal went on, "I want to assure you that we are not enemies, but friends. The reason we keep you covered now is that we may explain our presence here. We have been sent here to find Herr Blough. We are British army officers. Now if I lower my guns, will you gentlemen promise to hear us out, and to do nothing rash? It would be better if we could all act together?"

One of the men nodded his head.

"We will hear you," he said.

"Thank you, sir," replied Hal.

He returned his revolvers to his pockets. Chester followed his example. Then both advanced to the center of the room. Hands that had been reaching for the ceiling under the muzzles of the four automatics came down and a sigh of relief went the rounds of the room.

"Now," said the only man who had spoken thus far, "what can we do for you?"

In a few words Hal explained the manner in which they had come to Peronne and the object of their visit. The men listened attentively, but it was plain to Hal and Chester both that Hal's listeners were not greatly impressed.

"And how are we to know that what you say is true?" demanded one of the men.

"If you will point out Herr Blough to me I believe I can convince him," replied Hal.

He waited expectantly, but Herr Blough was not pointed out.

"It is my belief," continued the man who had spoken before, "that you have been sent here by the German authorities to spy on us. Now that our plans are known, it means death for all of us."

"Unless," said a second voice, "unless they fail to get out of here alive."

Hal was alarmed. He knew what was coming in an instant, and his hands leaped to his pockets. But

he had delayed a moment too long ; and so had Chester.

Several revolvers flashed out in various parts of the room and a voice commanded :

“Hands up !”

There was nothing for the two lads to do but obey. Taken at a disadvantage as they were, they would have been shot down before they could so much as have drawn their own weapons.

“Well, they’ve got us, Hal,” said Chester.

Slowly he raised his hands. Hal did likewise.

CHAPTER XXIII

ESCAPE

"SEIZE their weapons!" came the next command.

The two lads were surrounded by their captors and relieved of their revolvers.

"Search them for other arms!" exclaimed the man who appeared to be the leader.

This was done carefully and systematically. Hal felt a vague alarm that one of the men would discover the bluish piece of cardboard in his hat and thus cause more complications, but his fears were groundless. His cap was not disturbed.

"What shall we do with them now?" asked one of their captors.

The leader turned the problem over in his mind.

"We can't hardly kill them," he said. "Great as the necessity is that they be kept safely, I cannot stoop to that."

"No, we cannot kill them," said another voice. "Why not lock them down in the cellar? If we bind them it will be impossible for them to escape. We can have them fed daily. Then when the coup is

sprung we can turn them over to the British authorities."

"As good a plan as any!" exclaimed the leader. "It shall be done. Tie them up, men, and we'll carry them below and lock them in."

It was the work of but a few moments to bind the lads securely, and then rough hands carried them downstairs, where they were thrust into a dark and musty smelling room. The lads heard the bang of a closing door and the sound of retreating footsteps. Then they knew that they were alone.

"We can talk, anyhow," said Chester. "Wonder why they didn't gag us?"

"Guess they figure that cries could not be heard from here," replied Hal. "We're probably so far from the street that we couldn't make ourselves heard no matter how loudly we shout."

"I suppose that's the way of it," Chester agreed. "Great Scott! This certainly is a poor finish for such a promising start."

"Rather," said Hal dryly. "We chose the wrong course, that's all."

"A blind man could see that."

"Well, a blind man would have just as much chance of seeing a foot in front of him down here as we have," Hal declared. "I never knew it was possible for anything to be so dark."

"Nor I. Can you loosen your bonds, do you think?"

"I've been trying for the last few minutes. No, I'm too securely tied. There is not the slightest chance of my freeing myself. How about you?"

"Guess I'm in the same fix. I'm tied so tightly that the rope cuts into my arms. It's not very pleasant, either, I can tell you that."

Hal uttered a sudden snort of extreme disgust.

"What a lot of fools those fellows are, to be sure," he said. "Here we go through the whole German army to help them a bit and this is the thanks we get for our trouble."

"But you must remember they don't trust us," said Chester.

"I know they don't; and that's what I am kicking about. If they would trust us everything would go along first rate."

"But our sudden appearance——" Chester began.

"Oh, I know all about that. But you'd think they would have sense enough to know if we are what they take us to be we wouldn't have thrust our head into the lion's mouth, so to speak."

"But——" Chester began again.

"That's right," Hal exploded. "Stick up for 'em. Here we are tied hard and fast, and still you stick up for 'em."

"I'm not sticking up for them," declared Chester. "I'm just trying to show you that we would have

been just as incredulous under the same circumstances."

"No, we wouldn't. We would have listened to reason. I would, anyhow."

"Well, I wouldn't. I'd have done just the same as these fellows did with us, and it would have been a hard job convincing me that I was wrong."

"I didn't know your head was growing so thick," said Hal sarcastically.

"My head is not thick. You are simply letting your anger get the better of your good judgment, if you ever had any."

"Look here, Chester, are you trying to start an argument?"

"Looks to me like it was started without any help of mine," replied Chester.

"I've a notion to pull your nose," said Hal.

"Well, you can't just now," said Chester. "You're perfectly safe right where you are."

"I'll get out of here some time, and when I do——"

"Come, Hal," said Chester, "don't be a fool. You know I was only joking."

"Mighty poor joke, if you ask me," Hal mumbled.

"Question before the house," said Chester, "is how are we going to get out of here?"

"Well, answer it for me," said Hal. "I don't know."

"One thing is certain," said Chester. "We've got

to get out of here some way. Have another try at the rope. I'll do the same."

In vain both lads tugged at the ropes that bound them. The strands cut deeply into their wrists, but the ropes did not give.

"No use," said Hal at length and relaxed his efforts.

"No use here, either!" exclaimed Chester, and sank back panting.

"Looks like we must stay until such time as they get ready to let us out," said Hal hopelessly.

"It certainly does. Now I wonder——"

The lad broke off suddenly. His keen ear had caught a slight sound from the direction in which he judged the door to be.

"What's the matter?" asked Hal, in a low voice.

"Sh-h-h," cautioned Chester. "Thought I heard some one at the door."

"Coming to give us a bite to eat, I guess," said Hal, and laughed unmirthfully.

Chester strained his ears. He heard a slight creak and a moment later a gust of air swept across his face. This told the lad that the door was open.

The fact that the intruder, whoever he might be, did not carry a light told both boys that he did not wish his presence to be discovered by others in the house.

"Must be coming to help us out," Chester whispered.

"Not much chance of that, I guess, Hal whispered back.

"Silence," came a low voice from the darkness of the cellar.

"Who are you and what do you want?" Hal demanded.

"I'm a friend," came the low response. "Like yourselves, I was spying on the conspirators tonight. I've come to release you."

Hal gave a low whistle beneath his breath.

"Well, what do you think of that?" he muttered to himself.

Both lads became silent and their rescuer advanced cautiously to their sides and cut the ropes that bound them. The boys rose to their feet and stretched their cramped muscles.

"Be quiet now, and follow me," said their rescuer.

He led the way toward the door by which he had entered. He poked his head out cautiously, and announcing that the coast was clear, led the way from the lads' late prison and toward a pair of stairs down which they had been carried a short time before.

"We'll have to go through the house," the man said, "and out the front door. Some of the others are still here, so we must not be discovered."

The lads nodded their understanding of this statement and followed their leader silently.

Through the hall they moved with the quietness of a cat; and they came at length to the front door.

Hal and Chester were breathing with relief as their rescuer laid a hand on the knob and turned it. At that moment a head appeared back down the hall and a voice shouted hoarsely:

"The prisoners are escaping!"

The exclamation was followed by a revolver shot; and Hal, who brought up the rear, heard a bullet sing as it flew past his head.

"Run!" cried their rescuer.

The time for caution had passed with their discovery and Hal and Chester realized that safety now depended upon their fleetness of foot. They sped down the steps after the man who had released them from their dungeon prison.

Footsteps pounded through the hall and the faces of several men appeared in the doorway as the three fugitives dashed down the street.

"After them!" cried a voice.

The men rushed pell mell down the steps and gave chase.

After a moment the fugitives came to a cross street.

"Scatter here!" cried the lads' rescuer.

He veered sharply to the right. Hal and Chester turned to the left.

A bullet, then another and still another, flew after

Hal and Chester, but, fortunately, none found its mark.

Time after time the lads doubled around corners; and at last the sound of footsteps came to their ears no longer. The lads slowed down to take a much needed breath.

"Guess we're safe enough now," said Chester. "Now what are we going to do?"

"You've got me," said Hal. "We can't stay out on the street all night. We'll be picked up by the watch and we might not be able to give a satisfactory account of ourselves."

"Then let's hunt our beds in Tullier's house."

"What?" exclaimed Hal, aghast. "Great Scott! You know as well as I do that Tulliers is one of the gang from whom we just escaped."

"Certainly I know it," said Chester. "Chances are he will not be home the rest of the night. We'll be safe enough there. We'll lock our door. If anyone starts in we'll hear 'em. We'll be safer there than any place I can think of."

"By Jove!" said Hal, after some consideration; "I believe you are right. Come on."

CHAPTER XXIV

THE ODDS AGAINST THEM

THE lads made their way to their room without incident. There was still a light in Madame Tullier's room as they passed, but, apparently, their return was unnoticed. Both breathed easier when they entered their room and Hal had closed and locked the door.

"Guess we're safe enough until morning," said Chester. "However, we'll sleep with one eye open. We'll have to hunt a new place of abode in the morning."

"Right," Hal agreed. "Chances are Tulliers won't come home at all. We've created such a sensation tonight that the council will sit the rest of the night—some place beside at Madame Herrin's, though, I imagine. They'll steer clear of that place for some time to come."

"Let's get to bed then," said Chester. "By Jove! I wish we had been able to recover our guns. I feel lost without mine."

"Same here," Hal agreed. "However, we were

lucky to get away at all, much less recovering our guns. By the way, I wonder who that fellow was that freed us?"

"Don't know. You remember, though, that he said he was spying on the conspirators the same as we were. He evidently took us for Germans. Have you stopped to think what a peculiar situation we're in?"

"You bet I have. Our friends take us for enemies, and, at least, one of our enemies takes us for friends."

"Exactly; and the thing that we have to see to is that the ones who take us for enemies don't get the worst of it."

"Well, we'll give that a little thought in the morning. In the meantime, we'll sleep."

The lads had not struck a light on entering their room, and now they climbed into bed in the darkness. Both were tired, and so it is no wonder that they slept soundly.

Hal awakened several hours later just as the first streak of light came through the half-opened windows. He was instantly aware of another figure in the room. At first he thought the dark form near the door might be Chester, who had, perhaps, arisen. He moved his hand slightly and felt Chester still beside him.

Hal, his mind perfectly clear, debated the situation. If he aroused Chester the latter was likely to

make a noise that would tell the intruder that the lads were awake; and Hal and Chester were both unarmed, while the chances were that the man in the room carried weapons. Hal decided to lie still and see what would transpire.

A moment later the door—which Hal had thought securely locked—swung inward and a second figure appeared, followed a moment later by a third. Still Hal feigned sleep.

After a consultation in low voices, the three figures came toward the bed. At that moment Chester opened his eyes, warned, in some unknown manner, that all was not right. He saw the three figures advancing. He was not fully awake, but he was fully aware that he and Hal were in grave danger.

With a shout he threw off the covers and sprang to his feet. Hal, taken a little by surprise, followed his example. As the lads leaped up the three intruders, also taken by surprise, gave back a little, and Hal saw their hands drop to their pockets.

“Don’t let ’em draw, Chester!” he shouted.

He sprang upon the three forms. Chester was not a second behind him; and both lads struck out right and left.

Hal’s right fist crashed into something soft. His blow was rewarded by a cry of pain, and he had a faint idea that a man dropped. He was too busy keeping close to the others, however, to stop and take account of his first enemy’s injuries.

"Shoot 'em!" cried one of the men, as he sought to hold Hal off a bit.

A revolver flashed in the hand of the third man; but before he could bring the weapon to bear, Chester picked up a chair that stood nearby and brought it down on the man's head with terrific force. The man dropped to the floor and lay still.

Hal and Chester now closed on the last man. But the latter also had seized a chair, and with wide-sweeping blows held the lads at a distance. While the boys were trying to find an opening, the man who had been knocked down by a blow of Hal's fist, dragged himself to his knees and produced a revolver. His hand was unsteady, but he aimed and fired.

Chester felt something hot sear his left leg below the knee. With an angry cry, he turned, and, leaving Hal to deal with the man who wielded the chair, sprang at the man on the floor. Before the man could press the trigger again, Chester was upon him, jumping from the side.

A swift kick sent the revolver spinning across the room, and then Chester fell on his opponent in a manner that had been his wont to tackle on the football field. The two rolled over and over on the floor, for Chester's antagonist was a big man and a good deal stronger than Chester in spite of his first knockdown.

Hal, in the meantime, was busy with the man who

wielded the chair. The lad sprang in quickly; then leaped back as his opponent brought the chair down with terrific force. Hal had gauged the distance accurately, and the chair barely skimmed his nose as it came down. The fraction of an inch closer, and the blow would have fractured the lad's skull.

Before the man could raise his improvised weapon again, Hal had sprung in and closed with him. The man reached for his revolver, but Hal's hand found the weapon first. He seized it and sought to bring it to cover his antagonist.

But the latter was too quick for the lad. He leaned suddenly forward and buried his teeth in Hal's forearm. The boy uttered a cry of pain and the revolver fell to the floor. Hal shook free with an angry roar, and drove his left fist into his opponent's face. The teeth grip upon his arm relaxed.

Hal had no time to stoop and pick up the revolver, but he sent it spinning across the room with a swift kick of his right foot. As his opponent sprang forward, seeking to get to close quarters, Hal drove him back with a right and left to the jaw. The man gave a terrible cry of anger, and stooping, rushed again.

Hal sidestepped neatly, and as the man crashed past him, Hal straightened him up with a hard blow to the point of the chin with his right. Then he drove his left to the man's stomach, and as the latter doubled up with pain, Hal swung from his knees.

His right fist again found the point of the man's jaw and Hal's antagonist crashed to the floor. He lay still.

Now, when Hal had sent his antagonist's revolver spinning across the floor with a kick of his boot, the weapon struck the arm of the man who so lately had been disposed of by a blow with a chair. The latter was just returning to consciousness. His fingers closed on the butt of the revolver, and he gazed around the room curiously.

At last his mind cleared sufficiently to remember what was going on. At the moment that Hal placed his opponent *hors de combat*, the man on the floor leveled his revolver at the lad and pulled the trigger.

Hal felt a bullet skim past his right ear. Instantly the lad dropped to the floor and took shelter behind his fallen opponent. His hand searched the man's pocket for another weapon. His search was rewarded a moment later.

With an automatic once more in his hand, Hal had a different feeling. Now the man who had fired at Hal was able to get a clear shot at Chester, as the latter and his opponent rolled over and over on the floor. He raised his weapon and fired.

But even as he pulled the trigger Chester flopped over his opponent and the bullet of the second man went wide.

Hal sprang to his feet and pointed his revolver at the crouching man. As he did so the man turned

his revolver upon Hal. Both weapons exploded together. Hal, who had taken a quick side step as he fired, emerged from the smoke uninjured, but his opponent lay crumpled up on the floor.

Hal stepped across the room to make sure that the man would trouble him no more and then went to Chester's assistance. The latter had at length succeeded in gaining the upper hand, and his fingers were now twisted in the neck of his opponent's shirt.

Hal pinioned the man's arms to his side and commanded:

"Keep still, or I shall have to tap you over the head with my revolver butt." Realizing that the odds now were against him, the man ceased his struggles.

"Get up, Chester," said Hal. "I've got him covered. If he makes a false move, I'll fire."

Chester, greatly out of breath, struggled to his feet. To the man on the floor, Hal said:

"Get up and go over to the window. I want to have a look at you."

The man obeyed without protest, and as the lads looked at him both gave exclamations of surprise. The man was Tulliers.

"A nice way to treat your guests, isn't it?" demanded Hal.

"No worse than my guests treated me earlier last night," said Tulliers angrily.

"If you wanted to talk to us, why didn't you

come in in the proper way?" demanded Chester.

"I came in the same way you came to our meeting last night," said Tulliers.

"Well," said Hal, "that may all be, but——"

He broke off suddenly and strained his ears. Heavy footsteps—many of them—ascended the stairs.

"You see," said Hal quietly, "you have managed to arouse the watch. Now Tulliers, I want to assure you again that we are friends. Keep quiet and leave the talking to me."

The footsteps now were just beyond the door. With revolver still levelled, Hal faced the door. It burst in a moment later, and a dozen German soldiers stepped into the room. They stood to one side and another figure came in.

The last figure was that of Colonel Buettner.

"Ah, your excellency!" exclaimed Hal with a smile. "You are just in time. I trust you are well this morning, your excellency?"

CHAPTER XXV

COMPLICATIONS

"WHAT'S the meaning of all this rumpus?" Colonel Buettner demanded.

"As you will see, sir," said Hal, "my friend and our host here, together with myself, have rounded up a couple of thieves, sir."

"Thieves?" repeated the general.

"I should say so, sir. My friend and I were awakened by sounds in the room. While we were struggling with them, Tulliers here came up and lent a hand. That's all, sir."

"But why should thieves have entered your room?"

"Well," said Hal, "it is well known that correspondents, especially war correspondents, carry considerable money. I should say that that is the reason, sir."

Colonel Buettner considered the matter a moment. Then he stepped across the room and peered into the faces of the men who still lay unconscious.

"Frenchmen, eh?" he said. "I shall have to give stricter rules concerning the civilian population of

Peronne. I have heard that there is a conspiracy of some sort being hatched in the city. When I heard shots, I thought perhaps the matter had come to a head. Tulliers, you may go downstairs. I would have a few words with these Americans."

Tulliers bowed and left the room.

"And now," said the general, "I have another matter to take up with you gentlemen."

Hal and Chester were both conscious of an unpleasant feeling. They had no reason to be alarmed, considering that the colonel apparently had been satisfied with their explanation of events that just occurred; but there was something in Colonel Buettner's manner that told them everything was not just right.

"What is it, sir?" asked Chester.

The colonel waved a hand.

"Don't get in too great a hurry, sir," he said. He turned to his men, and waved a hand in the direction of the two men on the floor. "Take them, have them revived and locked up," he ordered. To Hal and Chester he added: "You will accompany me to my quarters."

There was nothing for the lads to do but obey; so they accompanied the German officer, though not without a certain feeling that all was not right.

In his own quarters, the colonel motioned the lads to seats. Then he gazed at them for some moments before speaking. At last he said:

"I understood you to say that you are both war correspondents of the *New York Gazette*. Am I right?"

"Perfectly right, sir," returned Chester.

"I would have you tell me," said the colonel, "whether it is altogether customary for one American newspaper to send more than a single correspondent?"

"It is hardly customary, sir," replied Hal, "but two have been sent before, as in our case."

"Hm-m-m," said the colonel. "I see. I see. However, I do not suppose it has ever been found necessary to send more than two, then?"

"No, sir. Not to my knowledge," declared Chester.

"It is as I thought," said the colonel. He clapped his hands and an orderly entered. "Bring in the prisoner," instructed Colonel Buettner.

The orderly left the tent. He returned a few moments later, with a hand on the shoulder of a second figure, who entered the colonel's quarters protesting at the manner of treatment.

As the eyes of the two lads rested upon this second figure, the boys almost leaped to their feet in astonishment. They repressed themselves with an effort. The figure that entered the colonel's quarters ahead of the orderly was short and stout. It came in with a peculiar rolling movement. It was none other than Anthony Stubbs.

Colonel Buettner addressed Stubbs. Hal and Chester remained silent.

"Do you still pretend," demanded the colonel angrily, "that you are a war correspondent?"

Stubbs had not yet noticed Hal and Chester.

"I do," said Stubbs angrily.

"With what paper?" asked the colonel.

"The *New York Gazette*; and you will harm me at your peril."

"The *New York Gazette*, eh," said the colonel.

"And your name, I believe you said, is Stubbs, eh?"

"Yes," replied the little man defiantly. "What of it?"

"Now don't get excited, Mr. Stubbs," said the colonel. "I wish you to answer a few questions for me."

"Very well, sir."

"In the first place," said the general, "is it customary for a single newspaper to send as many as three correspondents to the same seat of war?"

"No, sir," said Stubbs.

"Very well. Then how does it happen that the *New York Gazette* has done so?"

"What's that?" demanded Stubbs, scarcely believing that he could have heard aright.

The colonel repeated his question.

"The *Gazette* hasn't done it, sir, unless I have been fired," said Stubbs. "And if I had been fired I would know something about it."

"Well, the *Gazette* has done it," said the colonel smoothly. "Mr. Stubbs, I would tell you that two correspondents of the paper you claim to represent are already within our lines; in fact, are in Peronne at this moment."

"They are imposters, sir!" exclaimed Stubbs.

"Either they are, or you are," Colonel Buettner agreed. "I wish you would tell me, Mr. Stubbs, if these other two gentlemen in the tent are correspondents of the *New York Gazette*?"

For the first time Stubbs cast his eyes around the tent. They almost popped from his head as they saw Hal and Chester. With an effort the little man refrained from calling their names aloud. But he could not find it in him to admit that the two boys were correspondents of his paper.

"No, sir, they are not," he said in answer to the colonel's question.

"Well, they say they are," said Colonel Buettner, "and they have papers to prove it. Mr. Crawford. Mr. Paine, do you recognize this man?"

Hal and Chester stepped around the colonel's table and peered at Stubbs long and earnestly.

"I can't remember ever having seen him before, sir," said Chester, "although he appears to be an American."

"Nor I, sir," said Hal. "He must be an imposter, sir."

"You hear, Mr. Stubbs?" said Colonel Buettner.

Stubbs stood up straight and shook a fist first at Hal and then at Chester.

"You will say you are working for my paper, will you?" he shouted. "And you don't know me, eh? Well, I know you all right. Colonel, these boys have lied to you. They are no more war correspondents than you are. They are here for no good purpose. I'm here in line with my work. I would advise you to arrest them."

Neither Hal nor Chester had ever seen Stubbs so thoroughly angry before. Both Hal and Chester had decided that it would be unwise to admit to Colonel Buettner that they knew Stubbs, and now they knew that they must go through with their plan.

"And you say you don't know the man?" asked the colonel of the boys again.

"No, sir," both replied.

"It is my belief," said the colonel, "that the man is a British spy."

"I wouldn't be surprised, sir," said Hal.

"In that event," said Colonel Buettner, "it will be necessary for me to have him shot."

Hal shrugged.

"It's too bad, and he is an American," he said. "But if Americans will get mixed up in this business they must suffer the consequences."

"You are right," agreed Colonel Buettner. "I was in hopes that you might recognize the man and

vouch for him. I am loath to have any man shot."

"I am sorry that we are unable to do so, sir," said Chester.

Stubbs, who had listened quietly to all this talk, now broke out again.

"Hal, Chester!" he exclaimed. "Are you going to let him shoot me?"

"He seems to know your names, sirs," said the colonel, looking at them peculiarly.

"Which should convince you, Colonel," said Chester, "that we are what we represent ourselves to be."

"How do you make that out?" the colonel demanded. "It would seem to indicate that the man knows you."

"Not at all, sir. Certainly you would not expect a man to make a statement that he could not back up in some way. No, sir! You may be sure that before venturing into your lines—when he decided upon the rôle he was to play—he took precious good care to learn the names of the *New York Gazette's* correspondents."

"You are right," said the colonel. "Therefore, the man is beyond all doubt a spy; and spying is a bad business when the spy is caught."

"Mr. Stubbs, if that is your name," said Chester, "I wish that we could be of service to you. We are willing to overlook the fact that you have misrepresented yourself to his Excellency here and that you have tried to get us in trouble. You are an Ameri-

can and we feel sorry for you; but there is naught that we can do."

Stubbs grew purple in the face with suppressed anger; but from back a distance in the tent, Hal placed a finger quickly to his lips, and Stubbs became silent.

He knew that the boys would do what they could for him, but he realized from Hal's silent gesture that the positions of all were desperate. Therefore, he said nothing.

Colonel Buettner summoned his orderly.

"Call a courtmartial to sit here at 6 o'clock this evening," he said. "This man," pointing to Stubbs, "is a spy. Guard him carefully."

Stubbs followed the officer from the tent quietly. Colonel Buettner turned to Hal and Chester.

"That is all, sirs," he said.

CHAPTER XXVI

A SURPRISE

"THE thing to do now," said Hal, when they had left Colonel Buettner's quarters, "is to go back and try and convince Tulliers that we are friends and that we must find Herr Blough immediately."

"Right you are, Hal. But say, Stubbs is in a pretty bad way."

"He certainly is. He'll be sentenced by court-martial tonight. We'll have to make an effort to save him. That's why I say we must find Herr Blough at once."

"Well, we'll see if we can convince Tulliers."

The lads made their way to the Tulliers' home. Tulliers himself was awaiting them. This time there was friendliness instead of enmity in his manner.

"Will you come in here, please?" he asked, and stood aside for them to enter his room.

The boys obeyed, although as they entered the room they kept their hands on their revolvers, for they did not intend to be caught off their guard. Tulliers noticed this and smiled.

"Have no fear," he said. "I am convinced that

there is more in what you have told me than I have believed. That is why I wish to talk with you."

"I am glad of that," said Hal. "Now, it is absolutely necessary that we find Herr Blough within the next few hours. Can you tell me where we may find him?"

"I can," said Tulliers, "but first I must be absolutely convinced you do not seek to do him harm. In fact, I must know the nature of your errand."

Hal and Chester exchanged glances. Apparently both were loath to tell the nature of their errand to other than Herr Blough himself.

"You need have no fear," said Tulliers. "If I decide that your errand is not such as to justify your seeing Herr Blough, what you tell me shall go no farther."

"Well, Chester," said Hal, "shall we tell him or not?"

"We may as well," said Chester. "We have no time to lose, and we don't seem to be getting results."

"All right," said Hal. "We are seeking Herr Blough, sir, at command of General Sir Douglas Haig, commander-in-chief of the British armies in France."

"And what are you to tell him? What are you to do when you find him?" asked Tulliers.

"That we do not know," replied Hal. "From the meager instructions we received, we believe that we

are to place ourselves at Herr Blough's command. It may be that he has information for us to carry back to General Haig."

"One other question," said Tulliers. "Do you know whether, by any chance, Herr Blough ever bore another name?"

Again Hal and Chester exchanged glances.

"We've gone this far, we may as well go the limit," said Chester.

Hal nodded.

"We understand," he said in answer to Tulliers' question, "that Herr Blough once was known by the name of Andrews."

Tulliers sat up straight in his chair and clapped his hands together gently.

"Enough!" he exclaimed. "I am convinced."

"Then you will tell us where we can find Herr Blough?" asked Chester eagerly.

"I will," said Tulliers.

He got to his feet, walked to the window and pulled down the shade. Then he turned again to Hal and Chester and threw wide his arms.

"Behold Herr Blough!" he exclaimed.

Hal and Chester were dumb with astonishment.

"Behold Herr Blough," said Tulliers again, and smiled at the lad's surprise.

Chester was the first to find his voice.

"How do we know that you are, indeed, Herr Blough?" he asked quietly.

"I'll show you," was the reply. "Did General Haig give you anything the mate to which would prove my identity?"

For answer Hal removed his cap and produced the little piece of bluish cardboard.

"If you can match that we will know that you are telling the truth," he said quietly.

Tulliers leaned down, rolled up his left trouser leg and from his sock produced a piece of a cardboard similar to the piece which Hal had carried. The lad scanned it closely.

"There can be no doubt," said Hal at last. "We are, indeed, glad to find you, sir."

Andrews, for such we shall now call him, shook hands with Hal and Chester in turn.

"I have known for some time," he said, "that before many days messengers would come from the British lines, but I had no idea the messengers would be so young."

"I presume, sir," said Hal, "that now we have found you we are to put ourselves at your command. Our instructions were so meager that we do not know what to do now that we have found you."

"You are right," replied Andrews. "But I fear that your mission will be in vain."

"Why, sir?" demanded Hal.

"Because I have not yet gained the information with which I was to entrust you. I have not secured the papers which General Haig wishes."

"And where are they, sir?"

"Colonel Buettner has them. Whether he carries them with him or leaves them in his quarters I have no means of telling. I had not figured that General Haig would want them so soon, so I was not rushing matters."

"Well, matters will have to be rushed now, sir," said Chester. "We shall have to get back to the British lines as soon as possible. Can you tell me the nature of the papers?"

"The papers have to do with troop movements principally," said Andrews. "They also are understood to contain information of the German positions in and before Peronne. Also of the supporting strength that can be thrown forward should the British launch a drive against the city. In a word, they contain data that will tell General Haig whether an attack on Peronne promises any degree of success."

"I see," said Chester. "Well, my friend here and myself will undertake to get the papers."

Andrews shook his head.

"It's a big job," he said, "and one that requires time to plan."

"We've several hours, at any rate," said Chester. "We have conceived many a good plan in less time than that. By the way, sir, how does it happen that you have changed your name again?"

"For safety's sake," replied Andrews with a smile.

"As a matter of fact, I never used the name Herr Blough at all. When the Germans occupied the town, I considered that to assume a German name would arouse suspicion—would call for too many questions. Consequently, the only men who knew me by that name were the ones you saw when you invaded our council the other night. So it was perfectly simple."

"By the way," said Hal, "how about the men who were with you when you entered our room this morning? What will the Germans do to them? Is there not some way we can aid them?"

"I am afraid not," said Andrews quietly. "Neither, for that matter, can we afford to take a chance. If we were caught trying to aid them we would all probably be stood up before a firing squad."

"But it seems hard that they should suffer," said Hal.

"True," replied Andrews, "and yet there is not a man among us who would not give his life for the cause. Those two knew the chances they were taking. They would not have us risk failure by trying to help them out of their present difficulty. It's the fortune of war."

"You are right, of course," said Hal; "and yet there is one thing Chester and I must do before we leave Peronne."

"And that?" questioned Andrews.

Hal explained the case of Stubbs.

Andrews shook his head.

"It will be a job even harder than securing the papers," he said. "Yet, if you are determined upon it I shall lend what help I may. I have friends here who are willing to go to the death if I give the word."

"I trust it will not come to that," said Chester. "It seems to me that if we can hit upon some good plan, it should not be impossible."

"Nothing is impossible," said Hal sententiously. "At all events, we are bound to have a try at it."

"Very well," said Andrews. "Now, if you have no objections, my friend and I will retire to our rooms and get our brains busy."

"Of course," said Andrews. "Now, don't hesitate to call on me if there is anything I can do."

Chester and Hal went upstairs.

"Well," said the latter, seating himself upon the edge of the bed, "we've got two big jobs ahead of us."

"We have, indeed," agreed Hal. "One thing is certain; Stubbs shall come last. The first job is to get the papers. Besides, the minute we free Stubbs, if we are able to do so, we shall have to run. The whole camp will be on our heels."

"I wonder if our airship is still awaiting us?" said Chester.

"It will have to be," said Hal. "If it is gone, my plan will be no good."

"Then you have a plan?"

"Yes; I have two plans. One to secure the papers and the other to release Stubbs. Both are dangerous, but they will have to do. We don't have much time, remember."

At this juncture footsteps ascended the stairs.

"Now what, I wonder?" muttered Hal.

Both lads rose and faced the door.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE COURT-MARTIAL

CAME a knock on the door.

"Come in," Chester called.

Two German officers entered the room. They were the same two who had engaged in fistic combat in the little restaurant the day before. They advanced into the room and shook hands with the two lads.

"And to what do we owe the honor of this call?" asked Hal courteously.

"We were instructed by Colonel Buettner to ask your presence at the court-martial which is to sit in his headquarters at 6 o'clock," responded Lieutenant Barnhardt. "You are desired as witnesses."

"You may inform Colonel Buettner that we shall be there," replied Hal.

The young German officers saluted and withdrew.

"So," said Hal, "they are going to take our testimony to convict Stubbs."

"And they'll do it, too," said Chester. "We can't afford to go back on our previous story."

"I should say not," agreed Hal dryly. "However, they would convict him without our testimony, so we can't hurt his case any."

"I guess you are right on that point. Well, we'll be on hand."

Six o'clock came at last and with it Hal and Chester presented themselves at Colonel Buettner's quarters. They were ushered into the tent and assigned to seats at the far side, back beyond the big table at which the courtmartial was to sit.

Presently six German officers arrived and took seats around the table. These, with Colonel Buettner himself, were to comprise the courtmartial.

"Bring in the prisoner," Colonel Buettner ordered.

An orderly left the tent and returned a few moments later, pushing Stubbs ahead of him. The little man trembled visibly. At sight of Hal and Chester, however, he brightened up and faced his judges more bravely.

"Prisoner," said Colonel Buettner, "you are accused of being a British spy. What have you to say for yourself?"

"I am not a spy, sir," declared Stubbs in a trembling voice. "The story I told you is true, sir."

"A likely tale," sneered the colonel. "Would you die with a lie on your conscience? It would be better to make a clean breast of it."

"I am not lying, sir," replied Stubbs more quietly.

"Mr. Crawford!"

It was Colonel Buettner calling Chester to the witness chair at one side of the table.

Chester took the seat designated.

"Repeat the story you told me this afternoon," ordered Colonel Buettner.

Chester did so.

"And you are sure that this man is not an employee of your paper?"

The question was put by one of the other members of the courtmartial.

"I am sure he was not employed on the paper when I left New York," said Chester. "And if he had been assigned over here since, I would have heard something of it, sir."

"That will do, sir," said Colonel Buettner.

Chester returned to his seat.

"Mr. Paine," called Colonel Buettner.

Hal took the witness chair.

"Tell what you know of this man," instructed Colonel Buettner.

"I know nothing of him, sir," replied Hal quietly.

"Did you ever see him before?"

"Not to my knowledge."

"Then, so far as you know, he is not an employee of your paper?"

"So far as I know, he is not, sir."

"Very good. That is all."

Hal returned to his seat.

Stubbs, during all this time, cast reproachful

glances at the two lads, but they did not look at him. Both lads were on edge, for they knew that if Stubbs should break loose and claim acquaintance with them, the courtmartial might probe deeper still. Fortunately, however, Stubbs held his peace.

The members of the courtmartial now put their heads together and talked in low voices. A few moments later Stubbs was called to the witness chair. Colonel Buettner addressed him.

"Prisoner," he said, "there is yet a chance for you. If you will tell us all you know of the positions of the British troops, their approximate number and what you know of General Haig's plans, the courtmartial will suspend death sentence and order you kept a prisoner until the termination of the war. What do you say?"

"I say," declared Stubbs, "that, in the first place, I am not acquainted with General Haig's plans; and that, in the second place, if I were I wouldn't tell you anyhow. I'm a war correspondent and that's all. You are a lot of murderers."

Hal and Chester felt a thrill of admiration for Stubbs at these words.

"Little man's got his spunk up," Hal whispered to Chester.

"Should say he has," Chester whispered back. "I didn't think he had it in him."

"You will find most Americans have when it comes to a showdown," Hal said quietly.

They turned their eyes to the courtmartial again.

"So that's the stand you take, is it?" demanded Colonel Buettner angrily. "I suppose you know what that means?"

"I don't care what it means!" exclaimed Stubbs. "You may be sure of one thing, though. Uncle Sam will hear of this and when he does he'll make your old Kaiser do a few tricks not to his liking."

An angry protest arose from the Germans. Members of the courtmartial leaped to their feet.

"Silence!" thundered Colonel Buettner.

"Got under your skin, did I?" said Stubbs with a laugh. "I didn't know a German was that human."

The excited jabber continued among the Germans. In vain Colonel Buettner sought to bring order out of the chaos. The Teuton officers shook their fists under Stubbs' nose and fondled the hilts of their swords.

But Stubbs only smiled at them.

"Go ahead and shoot me," he cried. "Then see what Uncle Sam has to say. Oh, yes, you're all a little afraid of Uncle Sam, aren't you? Well, you'd better be, I can tell you that."

"If Stubbs keeps that up," said Hal, "they're likely to take him out and shoot him at once. That wouldn't fit in with my plans at all. See if you can get his eye and tell him to keep quiet."

Stubbs continued to jabber as did the German offi-

cers. But at length Chester caught the little man's eye and laid a finger to his lips. Stubbs gradually subsided.

Colonel Buettner, after an almost herculean effort, finally quieted his officers and they sat down again around the table.

"You have heard the evidence, gentlemen," said the colonel. "Lieutenant Barnhardt, what is your verdict?"

"Guilty," replied Lieutenant Barnhardt quietly.

"Lieutenant Bloomfield?"

"Guilty."

"Lieutenant Lobts?"

"Guilty."

"Lieutenant Drunstol?"

"Guilty."

"Lieutenant Holstein?"

"Guilty."

"Colonel Buettner?" The colonel put the question to himself, and answered it:

"Guilty."

Hal and Chester watched the proceedings with interest. It was not the first time they had sat at a courtmartial, but when a man's life is at stake, there is always interest, no matter how old the proceedings.

"It is the sentiment of the courtmartial," said Colonel Buettner, "that the prisoner is an English spy."

He paused and cleared his throat.

"Prisoner," he commanded, "stand up."

Stubbs stood up.

"Have you anything to say why sentence *should* not be pronounced upon you?" asked the colonel.

"Only that I am not guilty of the charge," said Stubbs quietly.

"Enough!" exclaimed the colonel. "Remain standing, prisoner, while the sentence of this court-martial is pronounced upon you."

Stubbs squirmed about uneasily. His nerve had held good so far, but Hal and Chester could see that he was weakening.

"I wish they would hurry," muttered Hal.

Chester nodded in agreement.

"The sentence of this courtmartial is," intoned Colonel Buettner, "that the prisoner shall be shot to-morrow at sunrise; and may God have mercy on his soul."

It was over.

Trembling, Stubbs walked across the room on the arm of Colonel Buettner's orderly. Once he threw a glance over his shoulder and gazed at Hal and Chester; but they gave no sign.

The courtmartial over, Colonel Buettner turned to the two lads.

"It's disagreeable work," he said, "but it must be done. You may go now."

Chester and Hal hurried from the tent.

CHAPTER XXVIII

A DANGEROUS PIECE OF WORK

BACK at the home of Andrews, Hal and Chester did some quick talking. As well as they could, they gave Andrews the location of the spot where they had hidden their airplane.

"If you will get it out and have it ready, it will save a whole lot of time, and may mean the success of our plan," said Hal quietly.

"I'll do better than that," said Andrews grimly. "I'll get the airplane out and I'll station a score of men nearby. If you are pursued, these men may, perhaps, hold off the Germans until you are aloft. I myself will be there."

"But that's risky for you, sir!" exclaimed Chester.

"What of it?" Andrews wanted to know. "Am I not as much interested in the success of this plan as you are?"

"But you and your men may be overpowered."

"And what of that?" demanded Andrews again. "Am I not an Englishman; and are not my friends Frenchmen? You attend to your part of the work and I'll attend to mine. I shall give my men orders

not to fire at the first two men who come toward them."

"Make it the first three," said Hal with a laugh. "I am in hopes that Stubbs will be with us."

"The first three, then," said Andrews. "And when you start for your plane, don't stop to shoot. We'll do the fighting."

"So be it then," said Hal. "Come, Chester, we'll go upstairs a few minutes before we start."

"Then I must be on my way to round up the men to cover your flight," said Andrews. He held out his hand. "In case——" he said and paused.

Hal and Chester gripped the hand heartily.

"Be careful, both you and your men," said Chester. "There may be other work for you to do here before the British and French arrive."

"We'll be as careful as we may while protecting you," said Andrews. "But we will remember that the most important thing now is that you escape the Germans. Good-bye!"

With a last farewell wave of his hand he was gone.

Hal and Chester then talked over their plans. Hal had not yet explained, but when Chester heard what he had determined upon, he exclaimed:

"It's dangerous, but we'll have to succeed."

"Exactly," said Hal. "Now I figure that Andrews will have his men posted in two hours. That will give us plenty of time. First we'll have to find

out where Stubbs is held prisoner. After that we shall act. The whole thing should not take more than an hour. We'll wait that long before getting busy."

It was a long hour, it seemed to both lads, but the time came at last. Chester closed his watch with a snap.

"Time to act," he said quietly.

The lads passed down the stairs and walked toward the quarters of Colonel Buettner. They both went in. The only occupants of the tent were Colonel Buettner and his orderly.

Colonel Buettner looked up as the boys entered.

"Good evening," he greeted them. "What can I do for you?"

Hal acted as spokesman.

"We have some information, your excellency," he said, "that we deem important. We thought you would like to hear it. We would speak with you alone."

"With pleasure," said the colonel.

At a signal the orderly left the tent. Hal and Chester approached the colonel.

"Now," said that worthy, "for the information."

Hal stood close to the colonel on his left; Chester was on the right.

"The information, your Excellency," said Hal, "is that the British soon will launch a drive on Peronne."

"So?" said the colonel. "But you must be mistaken. It is what we have been hoping for. We are prepared for it."

"I see," said Hal. "Then you have drawn up your plans against such a contingency?"

"Yes; if the British commander-in-chief could have a look at a set of papers in my possession, he would hesitate a long time before making such an attempt."

"Well, your Excellency," said Hal quietly, "it is those papers which we would have you turn over to us immediately."

"What's that?" exclaimed Colonel Buettner.

He took a quick step backward; and then stopped suddenly. Two revolvers were levelled squarely at his head one on each side.

"Surely you are joking," said the colonel in a strained voice.

"Far from it, your Excellency," said Hal very softly. "We want those papers of which you speak, and we want them right now."

"And I suppose," said Colonel Buettner, regaining some of his composure, "that you really expect to get out of our lines with them?"

"We not only expect," said Hal, "we intend to."

"You'll get no papers from me," said the colonel angrily.

"We would hate to use force," said Hal. "Will you give me the papers?"

"No!" exclaimed Colonel Buettner.

Hal looked at Chester.

"There's no help for it," he said.

General Buettner at that moment opened his mouth to call out; but Chester acted promptly. With a sudden move he reversed his revolver and brought the butt down with tremendous force on Colonel Buettner's head. The man crumpled up on the floor without a sound.

"Search him quick!" cried Hal. "I'll have a look through his papers."

Deftly Chester ran his hand through the colonel's pocket.

"Not here," he said softly to Hal.

"Then they must be here some place," said Hal.

He continued the search.

Chester took up his stand at the door to the tent. It was his duty to see that no one came while Hal was rifling the colonel's papers. Hal worked rapidly.

Suddenly Chester heard a footstep without. Some one was approaching. Standing a bit to one side, he raised his revolver above his head, holding it tightly by the barrel.

A form stepped into the tent and looked around. It was Colonel Buettner's orderly. He saw Hal busy with the colonel's papers and took a step forward. At that moment Chester's arm descended.

The orderly toppled to the floor in a heap as Ches-

ter's revolver butt crashed down upon his head. He made no sound.

Hal glanced up a moment, then resumed his work. Chester again stood guard at the entrance.

"Find anything that looks like it, Hal?" he called after some minutes.

"Not yet," replied Hal in a low voice. "But it must be here some place. Are you sure you searched his pockets carefully?"

"Every one of them. There was nothing there."

"Then they must be here. You watch that door as you value your life."

"All right. I'll watch it."

For perhaps ten minutes longer Hal continued his search; then he straightened up with a low cry of triumph.

"Find it?" asked Chester eagerly.

"Yes, and other valuable documents along with it."

"Well, stuff 'em in your pocket and let's get out of here. We haven't any time to lose."

"All right. I'm coming."

Hal moved toward Chester. At that moment there came a faint sigh from the prostrate German colonel.

"Hello," said Hal, "I thought you had fixed him for a couple of hours, Chester. He needs more attending to."

"I don't like to hit a man like that," said Chester.

"Guess I didn't do a good job. We'll tie him up and gag him this time."

"All right. It takes time, though."

"Not long, I guess."

From the colonel's bed Chester stripped the coverings and rapidly tore them lengthwise. In a few minutes he had made a strong rope. With this the colonel was securely bound; then a gag was stuffed into his mouth. A moment later the colonel opened his eyes. He could take in what was going on about him, but he could neither move nor speak.

"Say!" exclaimed Chester suddenly. "Has it occurred to you that we forgot to find out where Stubbs is confined?"

"By Jove!" said Hal. "So we did. Well, I've got a plan for that. Get me some water."

He moved toward the prostrate form of the orderly and stooped over him. Chester brought a glass of water which stood on the colonel's table.

"Dash it into his face," Hal instructed.

Chester did so, and a few moments later the orderly opened his eyes. When he did so, Hal had him covered with his automatic.

"One sound and you're a dead man," he said quietly.

The orderly trembled. Apparently he was not as brave a man as his commander.

"Stand up," said Hal.

The orderly stood up.

"Now listen to me," said Hal quietly. "We're going to walk out of here with you between us. We'll both have you covered with our guns in our pockets. You will lead us to the tent where the prisoner who is to die in the morning is confined. You'll tell his guards that the colonel wishes to speak to him. When he comes out, you'll tell him to walk ahead of us. You'll go with us until we are ready to let you go. A false move and you're a dead man. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir," replied the orderly in a low voice.

"Good. Now, remember, a single suspicious move and you'll die on the spot. All ready, Chester?"

"All ready, Hal."

"All right. We'll be moving. Keep your guns ready."

The German orderly stepped from the tent with Hal on his right side and Chester on his left. In the pockets nearest him, he knew, the lads had their revolvers trained on him. A miss at that distance would have been impossible.

Outside the tent Hal looked quickly around. Then he ordered:

"March!"

CHAPTER XXIX

STUBBS IS UNGRATEFUL

THE German orderly showed no disposition to disobey Hal's injunctions. He led the way from the tent without a word and once outside turned sharply to the left. Hal and Chester kept so close to him that their elbows rubbed his at every step.

For perhaps a hundred yards they walked in that direction, then veered again to the right. At last they approached a tent that stood somewhat apart from the others.

As they drew close a soldier stepped forward and called upon them to halt.

"It's all right," said the lads' prisoner. "Colonel Buettner desires to talk with the prisoner. I have come to conduct him to the colonel."

The soldier dropped his rifle.

"Very well, sir," he said.

He entered the tent and returned a moment later followed by Stubbs. Chester laid a finger to his lips as Stubbs emerged from the tent, and the little man caught the gesture and asked no questions.

"The colonel desires your presence," said the or-

derly to Stubbs. "You will walk along ahead of me."

Stubbs obeyed. Hal gave his directions to the orderly in a low voice and the latter, in turn, repeated them to Stubbs. So at last they came again to Colonel Buettner's tent.

Hal motioned the orderly to enter ahead of him. The man hesitated, but after a quick look at Hal's right hand, which still rested in the lad's pocket, he stepped inside.

Hal followed him quickly, and it was well that he did so. For no sooner had the Germans entered the tent than he sprang quickly across it and possessed himself of a revolver, which he snatched from a drawer in Colonel Buettner's desk.

But before he could level the weapon Hal was upon him.

"Quick, Chester!" he called over his shoulder. "Don't give him a chance to cry out."

Chester also dashed into the tent, leaving Anthony Stubbs still on the outside.

Hal's hand sought the German's throat; but before the lad could secure a grip, the man uttered a loud cry for help. He continued to struggle in Hal's grasp.

"Tap him over the head quick, Chester!" called Hal. "We've no time to waste after that cry."

Chester did not hesitate, much as he disliked the work. He stepped quickly behind the German and

brought the butt of his revolver down on the man's head. The man struggled no more.

As the orderly grew limp in his grasp, Hal released his hold. He stepped back and looked around the room. Colonel Buettner, from his position on the floor, was eyeing him with a look of the greatest anger. If either of them ever fell into his hands again, Hal knew, it would go hard with them.

"Let's get out of here," he said quietly. "That cry must have aroused every sleeping German for a mile. They'll be on us in a minute."

Chester walked to the tent entrance and looked out.

"Great Scott! Here they come now," he cried in alarm.

At that instant Stubbs dashed into the tent.

"Here they come," he cried. "What are you fellows hanging around here for, anyhow? Want to get me shot, I suppose."

Neither Hal nor Chester paid the slightest attention to him. Both realized the value of haste, but they did not intend to be precipitate. They were not going to leap until they knew where they were going to alight.

"Come here, Stubbs!" cried Chester sharply.

Stubbs obeyed without question, for there was that in the lad's voice that told him to move quickly.

"Out with you on the other side of the tent," ordered Chester.

Stubbs stooped and crawled beneath the canvas.

"You next, Hal," said Chester, "and run as though the evil one himself were behind. I'll be close on your trail."

Hal did not hesitate, but made all speed after Stubbs.

Chester paused for a last glance around the tent.

The German orderly was coming back to consciousness and Chester knew that the man soon would be in condition to tell the others what had happened and to release Colonel Buettner. For a moment the lad hesitated. Then he exclaimed to himself:

"Well, I guess I haven't time to tie you up or to crack you over the head again. Things are getting altogether too thick. I'll be going."

He stooped and crawled out of the tent. A short distance away he saw Stubbs and Hal speeding over the ground as fast as Stubbs could go. Chester sped after them.

From behind as he ran Chester heard a terrible hubbub. Evidently the Germans had entered the tent. The lad knew that it would be only a few moments until thousands of the enemy were after them. Their one hope of safety lay in reaching their aeroplane, which, according to Chester's calculations, was perhaps half a mile distant.

Hal was not making his best time. He did not wish to go on and leave Stubbs in the lurch, and the

little man's bulk made it impossible for him to cover the ground with the speed of his younger companion. Therefore, it was only a few seconds before Chester came up with them.

"You'll have to do better than that," cried Chester to Stubbs.

"I'm running just as fast as I can," Stubbs panted.

"No, you're not," said Chester. "You'll have to do better or you will be taken back and shot."

"I can't go any faster," Stubbs panted.

At that moment came the cry of pursuers as they came around Colonel Buettner's tent and set out in pursuit. The leaders of the chase could just make out the forms in the distance, and a scattering volley of rifle fire broke the stillness of the night.

"Down this street," shouted Hal, as they came to a corner.

The quick turn sheltered them momentarily from the fire of their pursuers, and before the latter reached the corner the fugitives had turned again.

In spite of Stubbs' protest that he could run no faster, he seemed to redouble his speed at the first sound of firing. Hal and Chester were hard put to it to keep up with him.

"That's the way, Stubbs!" Hal encouraged him. "Keep this pace up and you'll hang up a new record."

"But I'm almost through," gasped the little man. "I can't run another hundred yards."

"Oh, yes, you can," declared Chester. "You'll have to, Stubbs."

But the little man began to lag behind and Hal and Chester slowed down. They had now reached the outskirts of the town, and Chester knew that they had not much farther to go. He conceived a brilliant idea.

As he ran he drew his automatic from his pocket; and, dropping behind Stubbs, he pointed his weapon toward the ground and pulled the trigger.

The effect of this action was little short of magical.

Stubbs darted forward with the speed of a true racer in a final sprint. Hal and Chester were both left behind.

"Wow!" cried Stubbs. "I'm a dead man."

But the belief that he was a dead man didn't keep Stubbs from running. For the space of perhaps ten seconds he put considerable ground between himself and his two younger companions. Then Hal and Chester, increasing their own efforts, drew up on even terms with him again.

From behind could be heard the hue and cry of their pursuers, though they were not yet within sight. Chester felt that they had plenty of time.

"If Andrews has the plane ready, we are all right," he shouted.

"He'll have it ready, all right," Hal shouted back.

Once more Stubbs began to lag behind; but this

time Hal and Chester did not slow down. Both had conceived the same idea at the same moment. It was that if Stubbs thought he was being left behind he would endeavor to run faster.

And the lads figured correctly. As Hal and Chester flashed by him, the little man gasped out:

"Hey! Don't run away and leave me here by myself."

But seeing that the lads paid no attention to him, the little man once more redoubled his efforts and made better time.

"How much farther?" panted Chester, as he ranged close to Hal.

"Can't be much farther," Hal shouted back. "We should be close now."

"Well, I can't run much farther; and I don't believe Stubbs can possibly go another hundred yards."

"He's got to go another hundred yards!" exclaimed Hal, "or else he'll be killed."

Stubbs was puffing along in a gallant effort to keep up with the two lads, but he knew perfectly well that he could not go much farther.

"Wait for me," he called. "Don't leave me here to be killed all alone by myself. Wait a minute."

"Save your breath for running," Chester called back over his shoulder.

But Stubbs would not listen to reason.

"So that's why you brought me out here!" he exclaimed, as loudly as lack of breath would permit.

"You want me to be shot down as I run. Well, I'll fool you."

He stopped suddenly; and at that moment Hal uttered a cry of relief. A short distance away he saw half a dozen men around an object that he knew on the instant was the aeroplane.

"Here we are, Chester," he cried.

He stopped and Chester did likewise. Stubbs was perhaps fifty feet back.

"We'll have to get him!" exclaimed Chester.

The lads dashed back and each grabbed Stubbs by the arm.

"Come, Stubbs," cried Hal quickly. "We're at the end of our journey. We're safe enough now."

They dragged him toward the aeroplane that loomed up in the darkness.

Chester's remark brought a word from Stubbs. The little man had recovered his wind at last and felt called upon to say something.

"So this," he said, "is what I find at the end of my long run, eh?"

"This?" repeated Chester. "What do you mean, this?"

"I mean an aeroplane," declared Stubbs. "You know how I detest to ride in these things, so I suppose that is the reason you picked out this method of escape."

"Stubbs," said Chester sternly, "if you don't like this airship you can get right out."

"Well, I don't like it," said Stubbs, "but I can't get out right now. It's too far to the ground."

"We'll go down and let you out, if you say so, Stubbs," said Hal, and slackened the speed of the craft.

"What!" exclaimed Stubbs. "You want to put me out and let the Germans get me. Well, you won't put me out if I can help it. I'll fight first."

"The same as you did in the armored car, eh?" said Chester with sarcasm. "We ought to put you out if for no other reason than that."

"Oh, you know I was only joking," declared Stubbs. "You knew I wouldn't take credit unless it was due me."

"Well, it wasn't due you and I saw you take it," said Chester.

"But I was only joking, I tell you."

"A pretty poor joke, if you ask me."

"That's enough of that argument," said Hal at this juncture. "Stubbs, how did you get into the German lines, anyhow?"

"I never have much trouble getting any place," said Stubbs. "My trouble is getting out. Why, I simply borrowed a horse and kept riding. I saw British soldiers from time to time, but after awhile I didn't see any more. Then, next thing I knew, a bunch of Germans grabbed me and took me to Colonel Buettner. Then you fellows came along; and if you want my opinion, that was a pretty shabby trick you played on me."

"It was necessary, Mr. Stubbs," declared Chester. "If we had not chanced to be there in the capacity we were, you wouldn't be here now."

"You're right I wouldn't," said Stubbs. "I'd probably be safe on the German lines gathering legitimate news for the *New York Gazette*."

"I'll venture to say," declared Hal with a laugh, "that the next time a man tells Colonel Buettner he's a war correspondent he'll get a very unsatisfactory reception."

"And he'll have Stubbs to blame for it," said Chester.

"What's that?" demanded Stubbs. "Me to blame, eh? Well, I guess not. You are the fellows who

would be to blame, and I'll tip off the other war correspondents to that fact. By the way, how did you happen to hit upon that plan anyhow?"

"Hal conceived and executed the idea," said Chester. "Don't know where he got it."

"Stubbs is to blame for that, too," said Hal. "If you will remember, Chester, you told me that when you met Mr. Stubbs in Trieste months ago he furnished you with such papers."

"By George, that's right!" said Chester. "I had forgotten it."

"So had I," muttered Stubbs. "You can bet I won't show you fellows anything else."

All this time the machine was steering a straight course for the distant British lines. Hal kept a sharp lookout, for there was no telling where they might encounter a German craft.

"By the way, Hal," said Chester. "Did you examine those papers carefully?"

"I just wondered whether they would show that the time is ripe for a drive on Peronne."

Hal fumbled in his pocket with one hand. He withdrew the papers carefully and handed them to Chester, saying:

"Careful now; don't let the wind catch them. Look 'em over and see what they say."

Chester produced a flashlight from the bottom of the car and scanned the papers closely.

"Well?" asked Hal.

He got no answer, so deeply was Chester immersed in the contents of the papers.

"Well?" repeated Chester again.

"I'm afraid not," said Chester.

"Afraid not what?" demanded Stubbs.

"I'm afraid," said Chester, "that when General Haig sees the contents of these papers he will think a good many times before ordering an attack in force on Peronne."

"Why?" asked Hal.

"Because they show the Germans have anticipated such a plan; have, in fact, been trying to entice General Haig into such a move. These papers show them prepared for all eventualities, at least for the present."

"It's too bad," said Hal quietly. "I fear General Haig will be greatly disappointed. Our mission will have been in vain."

"And still not so much in vain, when you stop to think of it," said Chester. "General Haig might have ordered such an attack without knowledge of the facts. We, at least, have prevented that."

"True enough," said Hal, visibly pleased. "Well, we've done the best we can, anyhow."

"And that's all any one can do," agreed Chester.

"Right. What have you to say about it, Mr. Stubbs?"

"Me? Nothing. All I'm worrying about is

whether I'm going to get out of this contraption alive or not."

"Oh, you'll get out alive, right enough," said Hal sarcastically. "That's always the way."

"What's always the way?"

"People who do the work are the ones who get hurt," Hal explained. "It's the men whom you could get along without that always turn up safely."

"So you think you can get along better without me, eh?" said Stubbs. "All right. I'll not trouble you with my company in the future."

"Come, Stubbs, I didn't mean it that way and you know it," said Hal. "If I have offended you, I apologize. We've always been friends and we shall continue friends."

But the little man's feelings were greatly ruffled, and it was not until the aeroplane at last came down within the British lines that he smiled and shook hands with the lads and told them he bore them no ill will for their words.

Hal and Chester repaired immediately to the quarters of General Haig, the British commander-in-chief. An orderly conducted them to the general.

"We are here to report, sir," said Chester quietly.

General Haig looked at them approvingly.

"So you are back, eh?" he said. "You have made good time, and you have done well. Did you find Andrews?"

"Yes, sir."

"And perhaps you have some papers for me, sir?"

"We have, sir."

Chester drew the papers from his pocket and passed them to General Haig. The latter took them eagerly and scanned them rapidly. As he perused their contents, Hal and Chester saw a frown steal over his face. They said nothing and at last General Haig spoke.

"It is as I feared. An attack at this time would be to court disaster. I had hoped against this. But a man can do nothing in the face of facts."

"We are sorry that we were unable to bring you better news, sir," said Hal quietly. "I fear our mission was not a success."

"Indeed, it was a success," said the general quickly. Then, as the boys turned to leave: "One moment before you go, young gentlemen."

General Haig stepped to his desk and from the documents lying there selected two. Then he turned and faced the young officers.

"I was so sure you would return," he said, "and I was so confident of your success, that I have prepared these in your absence."

He handed to each lad one of the documents, which they received with blushing faces. They did not need to be told what the documents were and so they were not at all surprised when General Haig laid a hand affectionately upon the shoulder of each

and said in a voice that evidenced his pleasure:

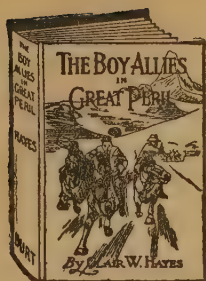
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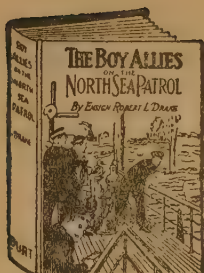
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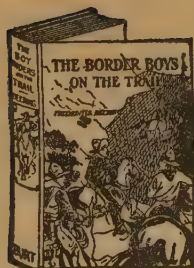
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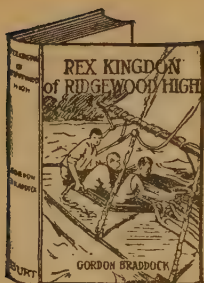
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